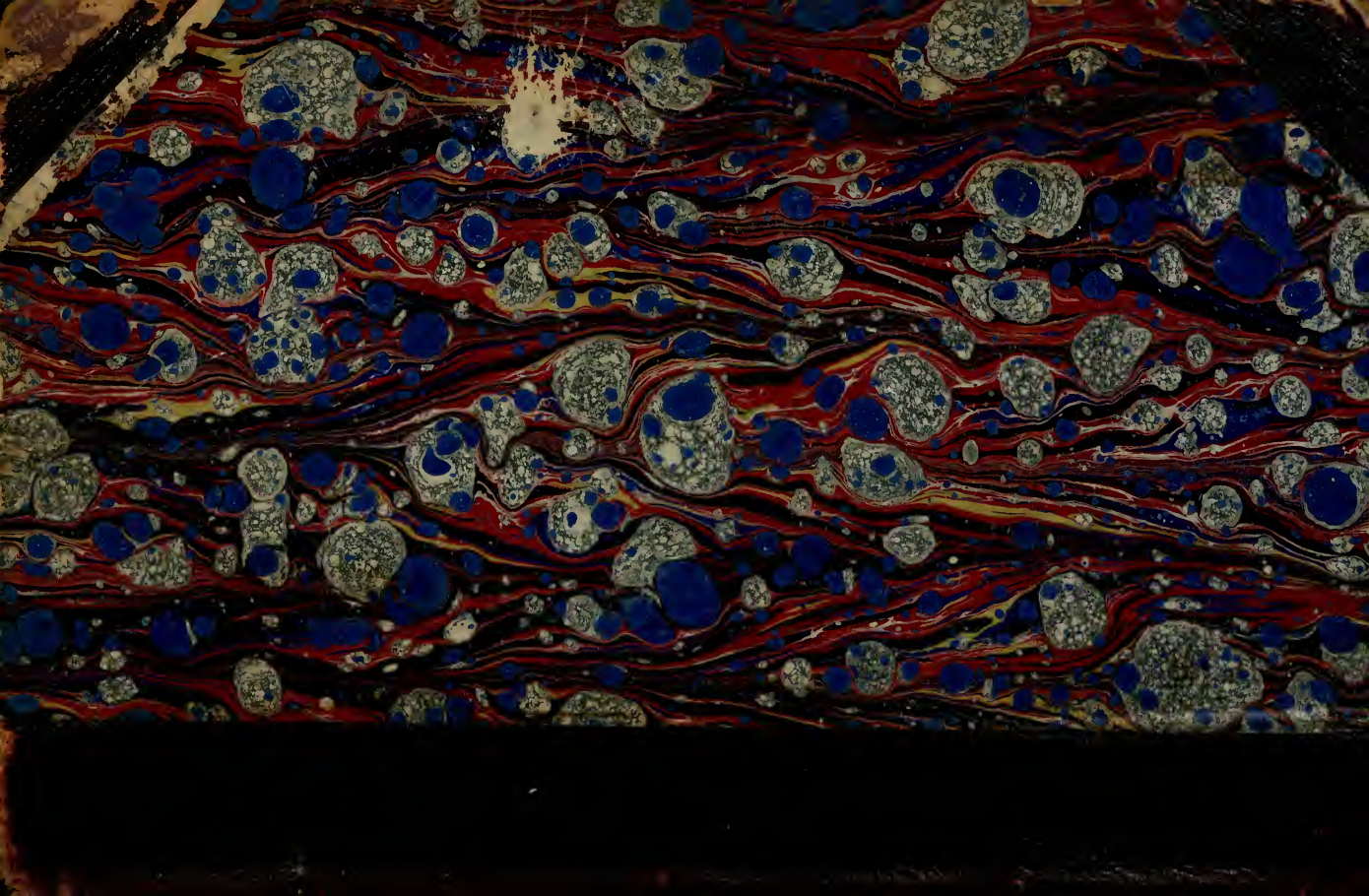

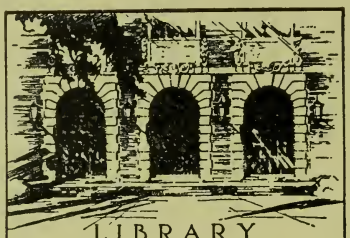

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
G764ma
v.1

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.

To renew call Telephone Center, 333-8400

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

MAR 9 1984

L161—O-1096

THE MASTER OF ABERFELDIE.

VOL. 1.

NEW AND POPULAR NOVELS

AT ALL THE LIBRARIES.

THE MAN SHE CARED FOR. By F. W. Robinson, author of 'Grandmother's Money,' 'No Church,' &c. 3 vols.

WE TWO. By Edna Lyall, author of 'Donovan,' &c. 3 vols.

THE PITY OF IT. By Mrs. M. E. Smith, author of 'It Might have Been,' 'Tit for Tat,' &c. 3 vols.

DAWN. By H. Rider Haggard. 3 vols.

OMNIA VANITAS: A Tale of Society. 1 vol.

HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

THE MASTER OF ABERFELDIE

BY

JAMES GRANT

AUTHOR OF

"THE ROMANCE OF WAR," "THE CAMERONIANS,"
"THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1884.

All rights reserved.

823
G764ma
v.1

THE MASTER OF ABERFELDIE.

CHAPTER I.

STALKING THE DEER.

'I DON'T know what Olive will think, or how she may view my loitering here, after all these years of absence, instead of hastening home to meet her; but, truth to tell, the temptation to have a shot on the purple heather after sweltering so long in India was so great ——'

'What does it matter what she thinks?' interrupted the elder man, laughing. 'When two persons are to spend the whole term of their natural lives together, they

can surely spare a few days for pleasure apart!'

'But consider, I have not seen my little *fiancée* for seven years.'

'You will find her a pretty tall *fiancée* now,' replied the other, 'and as handsome as any girl in Scotland, Allan.'

The speakers were Lord Aberfeldie (he was viscount in the Peerage) and his son Allan, the Master, then at home on leave from the Black Watch, in which he was a captain; and now, side by side, they were creeping up a steep and stony corrie in search of the red deer, but paused for a few minutes to breathe and converse.

The Master—so entitled as the son of a Scottish baron (we may add for the information of most English readers even in these days)—was, like his father, a tall and soldier-like fellow, with closely-shorn dark brown hair, straight features, and an almost black moustache, which partly con-

cealed lips that were handsomely curved, and expressive of no small degree of firmness and decision. He carried his head erect, and spoke rather with the air of one used to command when addressing men, but with great and subtle softness when conversing with women of every station and degree; and already, under home influences, his dark hazel eyes were losing the keen and somewhat hawk-like expression they had worn when daily facing death and suffering on active service.

Both father and son were handsome, though there were nearly thirty years between them in age, and both were, from head to foot, unmistakably thorough-bred men—the latter tanned deeply by a tropical sun, and his forehead scarred by a wound from a tulwar blade.

Lord Aberfeldie, now above fifty, had taken a turn of service for a few years in the Black Watch till his succession to the

title required his presence at home, though an enthusiastic soldier; and soon after his place in the regiment which he loved so well was taken by his only son and heir, the Master, then fresh from college.

Father and son both wore plain shooting-kilts and jackets of coarse heather-coloured stuff, with handsomely-mounted sporans and skeins; other ornaments they had none, unless we except the crest of Graham—their surname—an eagle taloning a stork, in their glengarries; and the peer, who was a keen fisherman, had his head-dress further garnished by various flies and old fish-hooks.

When *en route* home to the family seat at Dundargue, in the Carse of Gowrie, the Master had been tempted by his father to join him at their shooting-box among the lovely Perthshire hills, where, at present, the party consisted of only four—Mr. Hawke Holcroft, an English guest, and

Evan Cameron, a sub. of the Black Watch, also on leave; and these two, attended by a keeper and gillies, were creeping up another corrie, rifle in hand, about half a mile distant.

'You have had this—a—Mr. Holcroft with you for some time at Dundargue!' said Allan Graham, questioningly.

'Yes—for some weeks—before we came up to the hills here.'

'He cannot know anything about the implied engagement—that of Olive Raymond with me?'

'Implied?'

'Well—the peculiar arrangements that exist under her father's eccentric will.'

'Probably not—nay, undoubtedly not,' replied his father, eyeing him keenly; 'it is no business of his—so, whence the question, Allan?'

'Because he showed me, rather vaunt-

ingly, a very fine photo he keeps in his pocket-book.'

'A photo of Olive?'

'Yes.'

'The deuce he does. I have thought her sometimes too *épris* with our horsey friend Hawke Holcroft, and thus longed for your return. They renewed at Dundargue, an acquaintance formed last season in London, when Olive made some sensation, I assure you; and, now that you have seen her photo, what do you think of her—pretty?'

'Pretty! She is downright beautiful!'

'Ah—wait till you have seen her. She does credit to your mother's rearing and her governess's tutelage; but you have not exhibited much impatience hitherto. Gad, when I was your age——'

'You forget that she was such a child when we parted,' interrupted Allan, strok-

ing out his long dark moustache. 'But was it not rather cool of him to show *me* her likeness?'

'Perhaps; but then it was done in ignorance of the situation, and it is probably the result of some conservatory flirtation.'

'But just as he showed it to me, was it not strange that I heard the cry of a plover overhead, and——'

Lord Aberfeldie interrupted his son by a hearty laugh, and tossed away the end of his cigar.

'After eight years' soldiering with the Black Watch, do you actually retain the superstition that the plover is a type of inconstancy, and the bird of ill-omen Burns, Scott, and Leyden describe it as being?'

Allan laughed, too; but now, when among his native mountains and the scenes of his childhood, he could not help

old Scottish impressions returning to him, though certainly the ranks of his regiment were the last place in which he was likely to forget them.

The silver-haired and silver-bearded old game-keeper, Dugald Glas (whose real name was Mackinnon), a hawk-eyed Celt, with a weather-beaten visage, and bare knees that were brown as mahogany, now urged silence and no more smoking. He had discovered by the aid of his binoculars a couple of deer grazing, but pretty far apart, upon the hill-side; and once again by private signal the two parties began mutually their stealthy approach upward in the two corries that concealed them in the *forest*, for so it was called, though destitute now of trees.

'A forest, as the word was strictly taken in ancient times,' says Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, 'could not be in the hands of anyone but the king, yet in later periods

forests have become the property of subjects, or have been erected by them, though without being protected by forest laws. The royal forest in the Isle of Wight, in which there is not a single tree, is not the only English example remaining of the view taken of this old meaning of the word.' Hence, he adds, 'Let not the Cockney suppose that the word forest necessarily implies a district covered with oaks, chestnuts, or trees of any other description.'

A powerful and gigantic staghound, wiry, sinewy, and iron-grey—the noble dog that Landseer loved to depict—saw the deer already without the aid of glasses and strained hard upon his leash, an iron chain, which was twisted round the muscular wrist of the old keeper, who soothed and patted him, while muttering in Gaelic, '*Mar e Bran, is e braithair!*' (If it is not Bran, it is his brother), alluding to Fingal's

favourite staghound, which he was thought to resemble, as his hair was iron-grey, his feet were yellow, with erect ears of a ruddy tinge.

The forenoon was brilliantly clear, so the deer-stalkers had not the weather to contend with, as that, if untoward, may render all strategy vain.

Lord Aberfeldie and his son were as well aware as their skilled old keeper that in stalking the chief things to regard are the eyes and nose of the deer. His vision, quick as that of an eagle, can detect a human head above a ridge of rock or belt of bracken, and he can scent an intruder on his 'native heath,' if the breeze blows *from* the former, at a wonderful distance; and old Dugald Glas, who had brought the father and son to the forest at dawn with as much care and secresy as if an assassination was in hand, had long scanned the vicinity with his glasses before he discover-

ed the stags in question, and gave the concealed stalkers the signal to approach them.

The two animals were rather far apart; both were quietly feeding, and—as the season was considerably advanced—both in colour were marvellously like the grey stone and brown heather around them, and both were, as yet, all unalarmed as Lord Aberfeldie, the Master, and Dugald Glas, while pausing and holding ever and anon a council of war in low whispers, crept up the stony corrie, keeping carefully to leeward of the quarry they had selected, leaving Cameron of Stratherroch and Hawke Holcroft to approach the other as best they might; but it was in the present instance absolutely necessary that both parties should fire at the same instant, or one of the stags would vanish at a gallop, perhaps to the most distant limit of the forest.

In crawling after such game the head must be foremost when going up a hill, and the feet foremost when going down, and the stalker must creep on his stomach and knees; and all this, when done in the kilt, over rough rocks, sharply-pointed heather, and mossy bog, is not to be effected without considerable toil and even discomfort.

Nearly an hour of this kind of work had gone on, the father and son creeping side by side, softly and in silence, dragging their rifles after them, old Dugald following in the same fashion, with Bran straining on his iron chain; and once or twice they had actually to traverse the bed of a mountain burn that brawled hoarsely downward over its brown-worn pebbles and boulders.

The stag was still feeding quietly, and all unconscious of the approach of death; and the stalkers were, they thought, within

a safe distance now, and that it could not escape them; so Dugald Glas dropped behind, after whispering to the Master in Gaelic,

'Blood upon the skein, Allan!'

Then the heart of the latter began to beat highly as the moment for shooting drew near, for after all their care and toil it was quite possible that a grouse might whirr up from the heather, and with a warning cry scare the stag to full speed.

'You take aim, Allan,' whispered Lord Aberfeldie, 'and I shall reserve my fire. It is years since you had a shot at a dun cow, my boy.'

Inch by inch the Master cautiously inserted his double-barrelled rifle between the stiff tufts of purple heather that fringed the bank of the hollow up which they had been creeping, and brought the sights to bear upon the beautiful and graceful animal that cropped the herbage, with his

branching antlers lowered; and Allan, in the excitement of the moment, felt his pulses beating wildly.

'If I miss—if I fail!' he muttered.

'Tut—there is no such word as fail!' replied his father, unconsciously quoting 'Richelieu.'

Allan drew a long breath, while his dark eye seemed to flash along the barrel, and fired. Bang went a couple of rifles in the distant corrie, but Aberfeldie and his son took no heed of them. The latter's single shot had sped true, piercing the stag above the left eye, and now it lay prone on the heather, tearing up tufts and sandy earth with its hoofs in the agonies of death.

Allan's skein-dhu was promptly in his hand; the stag was *gralloched*, and Dugald Glas, waving his bonnet, shouted loudly for Alister Bane and Hector Crubach (or lame Hector), two gillies, to bring up the pony, on which the dead animal was slung,

and then the party set out for the place appointed for luncheon, as mid-day was now long since past.

'What the deuce are Stratherroch and Holcroft about?' exclaimed Lord Aberfeldie, while shading his eyes with his hand; and to their success in sport we shall refer in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

HAWKE HOLCROFT.

The process of creeping in serpent fashion over sharp-pointed heather, rough stones, and occasionally in the bed of a mountain stream, as we have already described, proved intensely tiresome and distasteful to a 'man about town' like Mr. Hawke Holcroft, who could not entirely conceal his genuine disgust thereat, and at the slowness of the whole affair, though reminded by Dugald's son Angus, a smart young under-keeper, of the big hart of Benmore, which was stalked for seven long summer days before it was killed.

'But, for the Lord's sake, sir, keep quiet,' whispered Angus. 'We are now close on one of the finest of Macgilony's dun cows.'

'I see no dun cow!' grumbled Holcroft.

'He means yonder deer,' whispered Cameron, a fair-haired and pleasant-looking fellow. 'Macgilony was a famous hunter in the olden time, and his dun cows, as he called them, were the red deer of the Grampians.'

But to Holcroft, whose idea of hunting the stag was to have a scared and bewildered creature—a fallow deer, fed on oats and hay, perhaps—cast loose from a game-cart in a smooth, grassy park, the perseverance, courage, and labour required for stalking in the Highlands seemed a simple waste of time and an inconceivable bore.

'Stop for a minute,' whispered Angus, as they crept *up the wind;* 'the stag can smell with more than its nostrils.'

As the stoppage took place directly in the bed of a brawling burn, where they all lay on their stomachs, Holcroft not unnaturally asked, with no small irritation, what he meant; and the wiry young Highlander, who was whiskered and moustached to such an extent that, with his shaggy eyebrows, he somewhat resembled a Skye terrier in visage, explained his theory—no uncommon one, though, of course, not admitted by naturalists—that the red deer can both smell and breathe through the curious aperture beneath each eye, even if their heads are immersed in water when in the act of drinking.

'Dioul!' muttered Angus, as they crept forward again, but on dry heather this time, 'we can't be too cautious, whateffer! A deer's eye is as keen as an eagle's, and his nose acute as that of a foumart.'

'The first shot shall be yours, Holcroft,' said Cameron. 'I shall reserve my fire.

He seems a powerful animal, and, if you only wound him, we may have the devil to pay!'

'Thanks—but how?' whispered Holcroft.

'If the dogs bring him to bay, he may turn upon us ere another cartridge can be dropped in the barrel, and gore deep with his horns.'

English sportsmen generally prefer having the deer driven to stalking them, for the bodily exertion requisite in the latter case tries so severely every muscle and sinew; but, to the true Highland hunter, one deer shot after a long and adventurous stalk, is worth a hundred knocked over after a successful drive by gillies, when the herd is urged in wild confusion through some narrow pass well garrisoned by breech-loaders in secure ambush.

While Holcroft and Cameron crept softly forward nearer the browsing deer, the

young keeper threw his plaid over the eyes of the staghound Shiuloch, and held it in by main strength, though his wrist was nearly dislocated by the strain of the leash, and the ill-suppressed whimpers of the animal were lost amid its muffling.

'Now,' whispered Angus, hoarsely, full of excitement—'now is your time, sir!'

Holcroft took a long aim; in his intense anxiety, and perhaps inspired by vanity, he overdid his aim; he fired at the precise moment Allan's shot was heard in the distant corrie, but only wounded the stag in the shoulder, and, just as he let fly the contents of the other barrel (and missed), it fled away with the speed of the wind, followed by the swift and powerful hound, which, quick as thought, Angus let slip, and both vanished down a deep glen, overhung by silver birches, close by.

'*Ohone a Dhia!* but he has missed it, after all—it is no use guiding a Sassenach

whateffer!' muttered Angus, under his thick, ruddy moustache; yet, as Cameron could read by the expression that twinkled in his hazel eyes, secretly not ill-pleased at the result, however.

'I almost did it—hit him, at all events!' said Holcroft, with intense mortification, as he was too much of an Englishman not to wish to excel in everything that appertained to sport.

'Almost!' repeated Angus, who added to Cameron, in a low voice, "Cha d'rinse theob *riomh sealg!*' (*i.e.*, Almost, never killed the game).

'Better luck next time,' said the young Laird of Stratherroch, consolingly. 'Allan has knocked over his deer, I see.'

'Attempt and Did-not were the two worst hounds of Fingal,' muttered Angus, in his Perthshire Gaelic, with a furtive glance, full of meaning, at Stratherroch.

'To the genuine Highlander,' says a

recent English writer, 'it is a fixed article of belief that there never yet was a Sassenach who knew more about the wind and weather, or about the innumerable other mysteries which furnish the stalker with the tact and skill required to perfect him in his difficult craft, than a cow understands of conic sections. With true Celtic caution and prudence, the gillies tolerate the opulent tenant from the south out of respect for his cheque-book and his frequent drafts upon it; but in their hearts they look upon him as an *intruder*, and are not sorry when they contemplate his receding form, as he turns his face homewards, and leaves moor, loch, and mountain, glen and forest to their natural denizens.'

And in this spirit Angus was secretly regarding the unconscious Mr. Holcroft, who had the genuine Southern idea that no man of woman born could undervalue him.

So the little shooting-party united now, and, not unwillingly, all sat down to have luncheon, as they were sharply appetised by long exercise in the keen mountain air, and on no other tablecloth than the purple heather; the ample contents of a hamper —game pies, cold beef, bread, champagne (cooled in an adjacent runnel), whisky, and so forth—were laid out by the active hands of the gillies, expectant of their own repast when the time came.

They lunched near the mossy ruins of a clachan—some of those melancholy ruins so common over all the Highlands, the traces of a departed people who have passed away to other lands, evicted by grasping selfishness to make way for grouse and deer.

There, the low, shattered gables, an old well, some gooseberry bushes that marked 'where a garden had been,' were all that remained of a once populous village,

whose men had often gone forth to fight for Scotland in the wars of old, and whose descendants in latter years had manned more than one company of the Black Watch in Egypt and the Peninsula.

On the sunny hill-slope close by, a ruined wall, low and circular—above which appeared the grey arms of a solitary Celtic cross, an aged yew-tree, and where long grass waved in the wind—marked where lay the last of the clan, whom no human power could evict or send towards the setting sun; and these imparted a melancholy to the solemn scenery, for solemn it was with all its beauty.

It was of that kind peculiar to some parts of Perthshire, where the subordinate hills, rising a thousand feet and more above the valley, are entirely covered with dusky pines, taking away all that appearance of blackness and desolation presented by naked mountain masses, and adding

softness and beauty to the landscape, which would otherwise be stern and grim. Nor were the glassy loch and the murmuring torrent wanting there, nor those passes where the mountains approach each other, and make them, like that of Killiecrankie, excel even the famous Vale of Tempe.

Though not very impressionable by Nature, Holcroft, influenced by the good things he was imbibing, said something about the beauty of the scenery, to which Lord Aberfeldie responded, adding, with a laugh,

'I do enjoy life in a shooting-box, and of all the entrancing sports to me there is none like stalking the deer.'

With his sodden knickerbocker suit drying slowly upon him in the mountain wind, Holcroft could only assent to this faintly, and wished, perhaps, that, like Stratherroch, he wore a kilt, and could wring the water out of the plaits thereof.

'Of old in Scotland,' resumed Lord Aberfeldie, as he lit his briar-root pipe, 'no man was deemed perfect in the craft of hunting till he had landed a salmon from the pool, shot an eagle on the wing, and killed a stag. But, when here in a shooting-box, I always thank heaven that I am at least fifteen miles from a telegraph wire, that letters can only come once a day, and just before dinner, and bills and lawyers' letters seldom or never at all. Have a glass of something before you lunch, Dugald,' he said, addressing his venerable keeper; 'I know you will prefer Glenlivet to all the Clicquot and Möet in the world.'

'A cless, thank you kindly, my lord,' replied Dugald, touching his bonnet, 'though my mouth can hold more of what-effer it be.'

And, bowing to the company, Dugald drained it in quick time.

'I daresay, Holcroft,' said Allan, 'you would prefer the deer driven to being stalked?'

'Infinitely!' replied the other, as he quaffed a bumper of sparkling Moselle.

'Well, I for one do not,' said the Master, emphatically.

'The Highlander of old would follow a stag for days, or even for weeks, if necessary,' observed Lord Aberfeldie, with kindling eyes, 'sleeping in his plaid among the heather, he would lie where night found him. With his long gaff he would catch a salmon between the water and the sky; but when stalking he had no conception of the brutal German battues now so common in the Highlands, and so degrading to sport,' he added; in his energy, forgetting that there was something of rebuke in his remarks, which certainly made Holcroft's cheek redden with annoyance, and his rather shifty eyes to lower.

The Master, aware that this subject was rather a hobby with his father, hastened to change the conversation by observing,

'How strange it seems, Stratherroch, that you and I should be so suddenly here after all these past years with the regiment—here among the purple heather and green bracken again.'

'And a few weeks hence will see us with it again, and back to the old pipe-clay routine,' said Cameron.

'Regiments are now no longer what they were in *my* time,' said Lord Aberfeldie, a little irrelevantly, perhaps, but pursuing his own ideas. 'Examinations, cramming and useless pedantry, promotion by selection and compulsory retirement for the officers, with short service among the men, render corps no longer what they were in the old days, each a happy, movable home. The time when a young officer often said, with just pride and

noble ambition, "My father and my grandfather have both commanded *this* regiment, and, please God, I hope at some period to do the same," can never come again! And what Highland officer now, in the Black Watch or any other of our national regiments, is followed to the colours by a band of his own name and kindred, or can speak of his comrades as "my father's people," or "the men from our glen;" and yet such was the case when yonder ruined clachan was instinct with village life, and the voices of children were heard around its humble hearths.'

'The hero of Ghuznee had a theory that no Scotsman was fitted to command a regiment,' said Stratherroch, laughing.

'I know that he detested Scotsmen, and brought six officers, all Scotsmen, to a court-martial; and it was then he is said to have made the statement which cost him so dear in India.'

'How?' asked Holcroft.

'Because, within an hour after, old Colonel Wemyss, of the 52nd, paraded him in rear of the cantonment, and planted a bullet in his body by way of curing him of prejudice for the future. Rather a convincing argument, old Wemyss thought it,' added Aberfeldie, laughing, as he knocked the ashes from his cherished briar-root, put it in its case, and dropped it into his silver-mounted sporran.

'Talking of regiments, I saw yours at Portsmouth, Graham,' said Holcroft; 'and I thought the men looked graceful indeed, with their kilts over their left shoulders and their black sporrans waving above their bronzed faces.'

Whether this was meant as a joke or a sneer, it is impossible to say; but his hearers took it as the former, and laughed accordingly, on which Holcroft added,

'I mean their plaid-shawls over their

shoulders. I remember that Miss Raymond laughed heartily when I made the same remark.'

'I don't wonder at that,' said Lord Aberfeldie. 'Olive is a girl who laughs on very slight occasions.'

'You have not seen her since your return?' said Holcroft to Allan Graham.

'No; but I shall very soon now.'

'She is a very handsome girl; what the deuce have the men been about to leave her all this time Miss Raymond?'

'All this time? Why, she has not yet seen her twentieth year,' exclaimed Allan, with some annoyance, as he thought of the photo.

'Her costumes are *chic*,' continued Holcroft, '*chic* to a degree! How I admired her portrait in the Grosvenor Gallery; and wise was the artist to label it "Fair to See."'

Allan glanced at his father, and his face

clouded to hear all this—praise though it was—in the mouth of Hawke Holcroft.

'You have an appreciation of beauty, apparently,' said young Cameron.

'Who has not? Thus, as Disraeli says, "the action of lovely woman on our destiny is increasing," and, as Miss Raymond——'

'I am Miss Raymond's uncle and guardian,' said Lord Aberfeldie, rather stiffly, and to Mr. Holcroft, as it seemed, a little irrelevantly, though cutting short whatever he meant to say; for the peer winced at the way in which his guest referred to his niece in the hearing of gillies and gamekeepers, and, more than all, in the presence of Allan, whose dark eyes wore rather a lowering expression; but, as all had hearty appetites after their recent exercise and long exposure in the keen, bracing mountain air of an autumn day, they were inclined to use their knives and

forks rather than their tongues, and the subject, however pleasing to Mr. Holcroft, was dropped.

The latter was not a pleasing type of Englishman, though his air and bearing were thoroughly those of a gentleman. He had a good square figure, but his legs were somewhat of the spindle order, as his knickerbocker suit revealed. He was flaxen-haired, fair-skinned, and somewhat freckled, with a tawny moustache and pale grey eyes; and strange it was that these, though weak-looking, cunning, and shifty, would assume at times, but covertly, a defiant, even ferocious expression, if evil passions excited him.

He was almost destitute of eyebrows, but had a massive chin; and as Allan Graham regarded him, as he lay stretched upon the grass leisurely smoking, he by no means showed his father's sentiment of friendship for this son of an old friend;

and there grew in his breast a mysterious instinct — almost a presentiment — that Holcroft would in some way or other bring trouble upon them conjunctly or severally.

After the keepers and gillies had their repast, the luncheon apparatus was packed up, and, shouldering their rifles, the party set out for the shooting-box, which was situated in a pretty glen a few miles distant.

Angus, who was—as his father boasted —strong as Cuchullin, again lifted the deer to the pony's back, and preceded by the family piper, Ronald Gair, with his pipes in full blast to the air of 'The Birks of Aberfeldie,' they departed down the winding path towards the dark blue loch that lay at the foot of the solemn, pine-clad hills.

Like the gillies and keepers, Ronald was never seen without a sprig of the *Buaidh craob na Laibhreis* (the laurel-tree

of victory), the badge of the Grahams, in his bonnet.

Ronald Gair's locks were silver now, but they had been dark enough when he played the Black Watch up the green slopes of the Alma, through all Central India, to the gates of Lucknow, and in later times to the corpse-encumbered swamps of Coomassie.

Holcroft winced at what he deemed the dissonance of the pipes, and cursed their sound in his heart; but he was too well-bred or too prudent to say anything on the subject as he strode by Cameron's side down the strath, with a huge regalia between his teeth. Indeed, he might have been pretty well used to their sound by this time, as Ronald Gair roused the household with them in the morning, preceded many a meal—dinner always—and seemed to spend most of his time in incessant 'tuning up' between.

'I have a suspicion that he is bad form, this Holcroft,' said Allan to his father, as they could converse, unheard by the other two, amid the din of the pipes, which Ronald blew as if to wake the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, or Holgar Danske in his cavern at Elsinore. 'I have heard that he half lives on play and his betting-book, and that his little place in Essex, or rather what remains of it, is dipped over head and ears. Indeed, he admitted jocularly to Cameron that it was mortgaged for thrice its value, three times over, a fact which would teach the holders prudence for the future. Why did you have him here or at Dundargue?'

'Well—his father and I were old friends, as you know; his father, in fact, by an act of great bravery, saved my life at the Alma, when three Russians were at the point of bayoneting me, as I lay helpless on the field; so you see, Allan, I can-

not help being at least hospitable to the poor fellow, and certainly his friend.'

Indeed, Lord Aberfeldie had always been the latter to Holcroft, and not seldom his 'banker;' but of this Allan knew nothing, nor was ever likely to know, so far as his father was concerned.

'He seems to consider Olive an heiress,' said Allan, after a pause.

'As—of course—she is.'

'And he dared to speak of her under the slangy name of "cash" to Stratherroch, as I, by chance, overheard.'

Lord Aberfeldie knitted his dark brows, and said,

'I detest slang—it is deuced bad form; but Holcroft belongs, I know, to a horsey set.'

The sun was setting now, and gradually his crimson glory was paling in fire on the hill tops, till it faded out and died away, and the shadows of the September night

crept upward step by step from the deep glens below, and one by one the stars came out above the trees—a sea of dark and solemn pines that covered all the mountain slopes—and ere long the red lights from the curtained windows of the luxurious shooting-lodge were seen to cast long lines of wavering radiance across the bosom of the loch, by the margin of which it stood.

Ere this, the great greyhound Shiuloch (whose name means *speed*) had returned, drenched with water (showing that he had pursued the stag into some distant loch) and bloody with more than one wound inflicted by antlers.

The sharp-set hunters had dined luxuriously, and cigars with brandy and soda had become the order of the night, when the Master said to his father,

'I think I have had enough of deer-stalking—three weeks nearly—and to-

morrow I shall start for Dundargue.'

'I think you are wise to do so,' replied Lord Aberfeldie, with a pointed glance.

'Sorry to lose you, Graham,' said Holcroft, concealing under a bright smile his secret annoyance, envy, and alarm, of all which more anon.

In this sudden resolution Allan Graham was influenced, perhaps, by some remarks of his father, the viscount, and pique at those of Hawke Holcroft, together with a natural longing to see his mother and sister, and a growing consciousness that he had been somewhat remiss and, to say the least of it, ungallant to his cousin. Thus, next day, he took his departure for Dundargue; but he could little foresee all the bitter complications that were to arise, and to culminate in the future, through his merely lingering to stalk deer in his father's forest.

When he went off, none shook his hand

more warmly than Hawke Holcroft, though the latter muttered under his breath,

'Fool that I was, not to make my innings before this fellow came; but if some people could be put out of the way, that others might take their place, how much pleasanter this world would be—to other people, at least.'

Little did the family of Aberfeldie know that in Hawke Holcroft they had among them an unscrupulous adventurer and most dangerous guest!

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE RAYMOND'S WILL.

'MARRIAGE, indeed!' exclaimed Olive Raymond, 'it will be time enough to speak of that when this "laggard in love," your brother, turns up here at Dundargue. Besides, all women don't marry, so why should I?'

'Most pretty ones do, and marry you must!' replied, with a merry little laugh, Eveline Graham, the sole daughter of the house of Aberfeldie, to her English cousin, as she usually called her.

'Such stuff all this is! Does not the author of "The Red Rag" say that "if

there *is* a circumstance calculated to breed mutual detestation in the minds of two young people, it is the knowledge that their respective parents have destined them for each other!"'

'How readily you quote,' said Eveline.

'Because I have the subject at heart.'

They were posed like a couple of Du Maurier's fashionable girls, and were leisurely sipping afternoon tea at a pretty Chippendale table from an exquisite Wedgwood service, and, for freedom to gossip, had dispensed with all attendance.

Both the cousins were handsome girls, whose bearded, belted, and corsletted ancestors—portraits of whom hung on the walls, and who had often

'Carved at the meal with gloves of steel,'

in that same Castle of Dundargue—would have regarded such a repast and such a beverage as 'afternoon tea' with no small wonder, and, perhaps, disgust.

Eveline Graham was very softly featured and slender in figure; but Olive Raymond, who was the taller of the two, was more fully developed, yet looked slim as a Greek goddess in a dress of deep blue that became her pure complexion and rich brown hair, with only a tiny bouquet of white flowers in the brooch at her bosom, and a multitude of silver bangles—emblems of conquest, perhaps—like silver fetters, on her slender and snowy wrists. She was fair and colourless, with dark grey violet eyes that looked black under their jetty fringes at night.

Eveline was more dazzlingly fair, but more *petite*, with soft, hazel eyes, and bright, brown hair that was shot with gold. She had exquisite hands and feet, and though *petite*, as we say, and slender, she had a peculiar grace and dignity of manner that only required a brocade-dress, ruff, and long stomacher to make her like

one of her stately 'forbears,' whose portraits by Jameson were in the room in which she sat—a modern portion of the grim old Castle of Dundargue, the aspect and construction of which edifice were very different from those of the additions that had been made to it in later times.

And as the girls sit there, in the tempered light of the afternoon sun streaming through the French windows that open to a stately balustraded terrace, and sip their tea leisurely, their conversation will throw some light upon the past, and perhaps the future, of certain of our *dramatis personæ*.

'When Allan returns—' began Eveline.

'Oh, don't talk to me again of Allan!' interrupted Olive Raymond, with a petulant toss of her pretty head, 'or I will begin to tease you about Stratherroch.'

'How?' asked Eveline, colouring perceptibly.

'He loves you—and you know he does.'

'Yes,' said Eveline, as a soft smile stole over her mignonne face; 'I cannot doubt it, though no word from which I could infer it has ever escaped his lips; but poor Cameron has little more than his pay. His paternal acres are mortgaged to the full—even the shootings and fishings, I believe, don't come to him. I heard papa express to mamma his surprise that Cameron could "pull through," as he phrased it; that he would have no ineligibles in future dangling about me, and that—as I have nothing—I must marry *money!* That was the word—oh, how selfish it sounds, and how hateful!' added the girl, while her rosy little nether lip quivered. 'Poor Evan!' she murmured, dreamily; and as she uttered his name her voice, which was soft even as Cordelia's, became like that of Annie Laurie, 'low and sweet.'

'Ineligibles!' said her cousin; 'and yet

he invited here Mr. Holcroft, who is well-nigh penniless, and against whose attentions Aunt Aberfeldie specially warned me.'

'In the interests of Allan, of course.'

'Allan—absurd!' exclaimed Olive, shrugging her handsome shoulders. 'You all seem to forget that he can only remember me as a little girl.'

'Still you are his *fiancée*.'

'In a manner of way.'

'Distinctly so, if the tenor of your papa's will is to be observed.'

'Then I think he might have had some curiosity about me, instead of spending days at that stupid deer-forest. For all he knows, I might have been a veritable fright!' added Olive, with growing pique, as she glanced at the reflection of her own beautiful self in an adjacent console-mirror. 'If he thinks that, as Master of Aberfeldie, he has only to come and see, and

conquer, I shall teach him that he is very much mistaken.'

'Olive—how can you talk thus?' expostulated soft little Eveline; 'his delay is probably all papa's fault.'

'I am sure that I shall hate him then!'

'Query?' said Eveline, with a saucy smile on her lovely lips.

'There is no query in this case,' persisted Olive, as she set down her cup with a jerk; for in her spirit of freedom there was at times a curious but unexpressed antagonism in her heart to the family of Aberfeldie, as if she felt herself somewhat in their power, and even to her own disadvantage, and this spirit, which Holcroft was not slow to discover, had rather encouraged his hopes.

'He will be sure to love you, at all events, Olive dear, if he has any sense or power of observation at all—you are so pretty—nay, so charming.'

'Any fool may love a pretty face, and generally does so.'

'But you possess much more than a pretty face, Olive.'

'Yes—the fortune which I am to share with him ere my twenty-fifth year.'

'Or, if you refuse——'

'One half of it goes to him, and the other, or nearly so, to charitable institutions,' exclaimed Olive, her sweet face paling with absolute anger.

'He will love you for yourself alone, I am assured,' persisted Eveline, in defence of her brother. 'You are beautiful, Cousin Olive; you ride, row, dance, play lawn-tennis, and flirt to perfection. Are not all these qualities calculated to excite admiration in a young officer; and then, more than all, you have such dear, funny ways with you.' And the warm-hearted girl concluded by laughing and kissing her cousin on both cheeks effusively.

The tenor of this remarkable will, which has been referred to more than once, was, to say the least of it, peculiar.

Some years before this period, Olive Raymond arrived at Dundargue an orphan, left in charge of Lord Aberfeldie—the child of his only sister, Muriel Graham, who had married a Mr. Raymond, a poor man, whom means furnished by the Aberfeldie family enabled to become one of the wealthiest planters in Jamaica. Both her parents had died early, and after her location at Dundargue she became a species of sister to Eveline and Allan Graham.

Happy, indeed, was Olive alike in her Scottish home in the lovely Carse of Gowrie, and when the family took up their abode, according to the season or the sitting of Parliament, at their West-end residence in London.

By will, Mr. Oliver Raymond left his entire fortune, which was very consider-

able, to his daughter; but, in gratitude to the family of his wife, on the strange condition that she was to marry his nephew, Allan Graham, whose death alone was to free her from that contingency. If she unreasonably refused, then, in that case, after her twenty-fifth year, she was to forfeit all that would accrue to her, save a very slender allowance—the share so forfeited to become the inheritance of her cousin Allan; and if *he* declined to wed his cousin Olive, then, in *that* case, the money so forfeited was to go to such Scottish charitable institutions as Lord Aberfeldie and the other trustees might select.

This will was, undoubtedly, a strange one; but then Mr. Raymond had been a strange and eccentric man, animated by an intense regard and esteem for the family of his deceased wife, the Grahams of Aberfeldie, to whom he felt all his good fortune had been due.

As children, the tenor of this tyrannical will in no way affected the relations of Olive and Allan with each other; and the latter—a manly and sturdy lad, when at home from the College of Glenalmond, where he pursued his studies and cultivated cricket, boxing, and football—petted and made much of the violet-eyed and brown-haired little cousin, who had dropped among them as if from the clouds; but after he had joined the Black Watch as a subaltern, and years passed on, and they began to be talked of and deemed in the family circle as an engaged couple, betrothed, affianced, and all the rest of it, the young beauty and heiress began to resent the terms of the will bitterly, perhaps not unreasonably; she became, as we have said, antagonistic, and was perplexed to think that her father could not have foreseen some difficulties on the part of his two legatees.

LIBRARY

Thus, as they both grew older, she seldom replied to the letters which Allan wrote to her, by his parents' desire, perhaps, rather than his own, till he ceased to write to her at all, on which she became severely piqued; and once when she was a little way on in her 'teens,' and when Allan was at home for a very brief period before departing to India, she treated him with an indifference—almost animosity—that made him deem the girl wayward, cold-hearted, even purse-proud, and everything unpleasant; and with this fatal impression he rejoined the Black Watch, and amid many a flirtation might soon have forgotten the heiress that was growing up for him at Dundargue, but for the letters he received from thence, and in which ample references to her and her beauty and accomplishments were never omitted; while she, on the other hand, when she became of a marriageable age, seldom

ceased to stigmatise the will as outrageous, indelicate, grotesque, and unjust. And now that her cousin Allan was coming home—nay, *had* come home—for a protracted period on leave of absence, she felt that a crisis was at hand in her fate—a crisis in which she, like a hunted creature, knew not how to escape.

'Yes, Allan will soon learn to love you for your own sake,' returned the gentle Eveline, after a pause.

'How can I ever be certain of that? Oh, I owe little indeed to papa, who by such a will as his seeks to degrade both your brother and myself,' replied Olive.

'Degrade!' exclaimed Eveline, her hazel eyes distending.

'Yes—by forcing us into a marriage on one hand, or to accepting starvation on the other.'

'Starvation!—such strong language, Olive,' said Eveline, in a tone of rebuke.

Of the alleged tie that bound her to Allan Graham, and of the latter himself, personally, she had never thought so seriously as she had done of *late;* and, truth to tell, in the opportunities afforded by mutual residence in a country house—that great rambling castle especially—Mr. Hawke Holcroft, by his subtle attentions when no one else was near, had begun to interest her more than Lord or Lady Aberfeldie could have relished or conceived; and to her it seemed that for some time back at Dundargue (continuing a sentiment he had striven to rouse during a past season in London) his eyes had been telling in imploring and passionate glances what his lips had not yet the audacity to utter; but then the girl was young, enthusiastic, impressionable, and far from insensible to admiration and flattery.

Though she did not and could not regard Allan Graham as a lover, and disliked

thus to view him in the light of her intended husband, circumstances now compelled her to *think* of him ; and though she remembered him chiefly as the playmate of her childhood, she was piqued that he seemed in no haste to meet and see her, but instead had openly manifested, as she thought, indifference and lack of interest or curiosity, by shooting at Aberfeldie Lodge for days.

Thus pique made her not indisposed to encourage the attention of others, especially of Hawke Holcroft, as we shall show, when he returned to Dundargue before his departure for London.

Olive Raymond in her pride of heart bitterly resented the tenor of her father's will. She knew that by the chances of war, climate, and foreign service generally, she might never have seen her cousin again ; but now the inevitable seemed at hand, and she felt herself in a measure

set apart for him as fairly as if she had personally betrothed herself; but was she to be bound, while he was absolutely free? And stories she had heard—some of them artfully and casually dropped by Holcroft—of more than one flirtation at Chatham and elsewhere, added to the pique in which she was indulging.

Lady Aberfeldie now came in through one of the open French windows for her cup of afternoon tea, with a bright scarlet shawl loosely floating over her handsome head and shapely shoulders, quitting the terrace, where she had been amusing herself by feeding the peacocks.

She was looking unusually radiant as she announced that Angus, the young keeper, had just come from the shooting lodge to inform her that the Master would be home that afternoon, and that his rooms must be put in order for him without delay.

So, on hearing this, the wilful Olive resolved to pay a protracted visit elsewhere, and to be absent when he did arrive.

No woman understood the art of dressing better than Lady Aberfeldie, and well was she aware how truly a dainty maize or a coral colour with rich black lace trimmings became her brunette tints, her dark hair and eyes, her pure, yet slightly olive complexion. Her whole air was graceful and queenly, as befitted one who was always to 'walk in silk attire.'

Lady Aberfeldie never forgot that she had been the belle of three seasons in Belgravia, and an heiress to the boot, though the memories of others might be less retentive; and now, in her fortieth year, she was a very handsome blooming woman still.

'We must have some dinners and no end of dances and lawn-tennis parties, mamma, in honour of Allan's return,' said

Eveline, as she assisted her mother to tea.

'Thank God, my dear boy is home—home again—and safe at last—after all he has faced and undergone,' said Lady Aberfeldie, with a bright and fond expression in her fine face. 'Why, it seems but yesterday, Olive, that you and he were little chits playing together on the lawn or at Nannie's knee—when you had rag dolls, and used to sing together of the old woman that lived in a shoe, or "High upon Highlands and low upon Tay," or of

"Alexander, King of Macedon,
Who conquered the world but Scotland alone;
When he came to Scotland his courage grew cold,
To find a little nation courageous and bold,
So stout and so bold—"

You remember the nursery song, Olive?'

'I have forgotten it, aunt.'

'Then I hope you will remember in its place the adage——'

'What adage?' interrupted Olive sharply.

'That a good son makes a good husband,' said Lady Aberfeldie, archly, and laughing as she tapped her niece's soft cheek with her teaspoon.

'Adages are not to my taste, aunt.'

'Child, what makes you seem so cross to-day?'

'The weather, perhaps,' suggested Eveline.

But Olive, who had rather a mutinous expression in her soft face, remained silent.

'This is bad form in our day of joy,' said Lady Aberfeldie, who had been eyeing her closely. 'In society well-bred people always control their emotions—their feelings.'

'Easy enough for them, aunt.'

'How?'

'Because they have seldom any feelings to control.'

And to prevent more being said with reference to Allan—a subject she dreaded —Olive Raymond withdrew.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GRAHAMS OF DUNDARGUE.

Who would have imagined that within a few yards of the elegant and stately modern drawing-room in which these three handsome women of the best style were chatting and sipping their tea, there still existed within the old walls of Dundargue a hideous *oubliette* or bottle dungeon, like those that were in the Castle of St. Andrews and ancient peel of Linlithgow—so named from the French word to 'forget.'

Shaped like a bottle, it was—and is—totally dark and of great depth, with no outlet but its narrow mouth, through

which prisoners were precipitated and left to die. 'Dante,' says Victor Hugo, when describing that in the Bastille, 'could find nothing better for the construction of his hell. These dungeon-funnels usually terminated in a deep hole like a tub, in which Dante has placed his Satan, and in which society placed the criminal condemned to death. When once a miserable human being was interred there—farewell light, air, life, and hope! It never went out but to the gibbet or the stake. Sometimes it was left to rot there, and human justice called that forgetting. Between mankind and himself the condemned felt an accumulation of stones and jailers, and the whole prison was but one enormous and complicated lock that barred him out of the living world.'

From such places the shrieks and wails of despair and death—death from thirst and hunger—never reach the upper air.

When the oubliette of Dundargue was examined a few years ago there was found in it a mass of unctuous-looking mould that made those shudder who looked upon it. It was full of skulls and human bones. Of whom those beings had been even tradition was silent; but, as some coins of Edward I. of England were found among the ghastly remains, they were supposed to have been certain English prisoners or fugitives, who, when flying from the siege of Perth, had fallen into the hands of Sir Malise Graham of Dundargue, in the Carse of Gowrie, a relentless enemy of the invaders of his country, who said, grimly, 'A few Englishmen less in the world would make the world all the better,' and, dropping them successively into the oubliette, placed a huge stone over the mouth of it, and 'forgot' all about them.

From a short distance beyond Dundee,

called 'The Beautiful' in the days of old, the lovely and fertile Carse of Gowrie, so famed in Scottish song, stretches far westward, bounded by the Firth of Tay on the south, and a line of undulating hills on the north, till it narrows to a vale among the rocky eminences that overlook the fair city of Perth.

The Carse is not quite a dead level, for here and there slope up wooded or cultivated elevations, named Inches, serving to show that in the ages they won their name the Carse had been a wide, open lake; but above one of these inches towers the abrupt, though not very lofty, rock crowned by the Castle of Dundargue, an edifice on which the surrounding hills have looked down for centuries.

Bronze or iron rings, to which the Romans are said to have moored their galleys, were lately to be seen in the rock of Dundargue, and cables have been

found at the foot of the Sidlaw Hills, relics of the time when an inland sea rolled its waves against their now grassy slopes.

The original castle, or strong square tower, starts flush from the edge of the rock, out of which its oubliette and lower vaults are hollowed, standing clear and minute against the sky, and its machicolated battlements rise high above the more florid modern additions of the days of James VI. and Queen Anne.

From its stone bartizan can be seen the sweep of the broad, blue Firth of Tay, with its vessels, the varied surface of the beautiful Carse of Gowrie clothed with leafy timber, narrow stripes of sand-edged land, and long stretches of cultivated ground, studded with curious old orchards and ancient and hoary forests of dwarf oak; and on the north and west the glorious blue mountains, piled over each other

in ranges, and capped, afar off, by the historic Grampians.

The earliest portion of the edifice is said to have been built by Sir Malise Graham, and possesses the battlemented bartizan, which was a decided feature in the architecture of Scotland long before her intimate connection with the Continent; and the tenures of many houses in the vicinity are still held by owners who, if they had to fulfil the original obligations, would be compelled to bring to the castle coal for its fires, beer and beef for its tables, and oats for the chargers of the men-at-arms, with cords to bind and hang prisoners condemned to the dule-tree.

The Grahams, Viscounts of Aberfeldie and Barons of Dundargue in the peerage of Scotland, had the barony bestowed on them in 1600, in consequence of the bravery of the then laird at the battle of Benrinnes, six years before, and the

viscounty in 1648, for doughty deeds done in the wars of the Covenant; but they had been lairds of Dundargue in days that were remote indeed—the days of that Graham who, when expiring of a mortal wound on the field of Dunbar, gave his sword—the same weapon now preserved in the house of Montrose—to his son, 'the Graham' of future battles, 'the Richt Hand of Wallace,' in whose arms he expired of a wound, after the battle of Falkirk, leaving the patronymic of 'gallant' to all his descendants.

In one apartment hung with Gobelin tapestry stood a bed wherein Charles II. had reposed before his coronation at Scone; and another had been occupied by his nephew, James VIII., of the Scottish Jacobites, before he went to visit Castle Lyon, the guest of John, Lord Aberfeldie, who declined to sit in the Union Parliament, and who, to the end of his days, even when

George III. was king, was wont to assert 'that green peas and the other edibles were always a month later, after that vile and degrading incorporation,' and that many a sweet flower never blossomed again after the White Rose was destroyed at Culloden.

In right of gift to an ancestor, the present peer was Hereditary Keeper of the Royal Palace of Falkland, and as such wore a key and chain of silver at his neck on collar days at Windsor and elsewhere.

It was a September afternoon—almost evening—when the pastures had become parched, the foliage shrivelled and of various tints, and high-piled wains came rocking over the furrowed fields and through green lanes as the harvest was led home, that a horseman 'might have been seen' (to use the phraseology of Mr. G. P. R. James)—nay, was seen—to ride leisurely down the Carse and take a flying leap over

a hedge into the great lawn of Dundargue, and then, after trotting his horse between belts of trees, he drew his bridle for a few minutes, while he lingered and regarded fondly and admiringly the old structure, which he had not seen for well-nigh seven years; and Allan, the Master of Aberfeldie —for he the rider was—thought there was not in all the Carse of Gowrie another residence to compare with Dundargue for the many stories and characteristics that circle about a house which has been for ages the home of one family, with all its historic memories, its traditions and patriotism.

The shadows of the great old trees under which more than one Scottish king had blown his hunting-horn fell far along the turf, that was green as an emerald and soft as velvet. A semi-transparent haze, mingling with the sunshine, pervaded the Carse land; the smoke of an adjacent vil-

lage ascended from the hoary orchards around it, and far eastward fell the shadow of the tall and weather-worn keep of Dundargue, with all its tourelles, or Scottish turrets, tinted redly by the rays of the setting sun; and Allan's heart swelled as he looked around, for the love of his native land was strong within him, and he recalled the words of an English writer, who describes it as the place chosen by Nature as the mirror of her beauty:

'She has planted it in the northern seas, with its mountains fronting the western sun, and watered its plains and valleys with a thousand streams, over which the lights of heaven are poured with an illumination and a glory, with an entanglement and a mingling of all the colours that can make earth beautiful. There is no land in all the world which, for the softer splendours of mountain and fell, wood and stream, surpasses Scotland!'

And Allan now remembered that the green ridge on which he had reined up his horse for a moment or two had been to him a place of fear, when a child, as the abode of the *Daoine Shi*—the goblins or fairies—who could be heard at work in the heart of the knoll, busily opening and shutting great chests, the contents of which were alleged to be the pillage of pantries, larders, and meal-girnels; and once an old housekeeper at Dundargue, who contrived to circumvent them by securing the door of her premises, was struck with blindness, from which she did not recover till the barrier was removed.

Allan saw a lady suddenly appear upon a path close by that which led to the avenue; and she proved to be no other than Olive Raymond, who, intent on being absent when he arrived, came thus upon him face to face, yet neither knew the other.

On her arm she bore a little basket, with some presents for her poor pensioners. The cordiality and kindness of Olive to the poor and labouring people made the periodical return of the household from London and elsewhere more than a matter for local rejoicing. There were none about Dundargue but loved her, as they also did Eveline Graham, though the latter did less among them; and the Scottish peasantry, it must be borne in mind, unlike others elsewhere, are usually too self-reliant and full of proper pride to accept aid from Dorcas, blanket, food, or coal societies.

Well mounted, Allan had substituted a light-grey tweed suit, which well became his dark complexion, for his shooting-kilt and jacket, and as a sudden light or conviction came upon him, aided by a memory of the photo he had seen in Holcroft's possession, he sprang from his horse when the young lady drew near.

'I beg your pardon,' said he, as he threw the bridle over his arm and lifted his hat; 'I cannot be mistaken, changed though you are—you are my cousin, Olive Raymond?'

She blushed deeply, and said,

'And you—are Allan Graham!'

'Yes, Olive. Oh! how good, how kind of you to come and meet me,' he replied, his heart beating lightly as he looked into her beautiful face and deftly possessed himself of her hands.

'Far from it,' she replied, seeking to release herself, and now growing pale with positive annoyance at his supposition. 'I have some duties to do at the village. I hope you enjoyed your shooting excursion?' she observed, after a pause.

'I did—and yet——'

'So much so, indeed, that you were in no haste to come home,' said she, laughing to conceal her secret vexation at the rencontre.

Allan found his intended wife all that he could have wished, and more than he could have imagined. The little girl he had left, had now expanded into a tall, proud, and lovely one—lovelier than he had ever dreamed of her being; and under her pretty black velvet hat her grey-violet eyes regarded him with a curious mixture of shyness and confusion in their expression, and—though he did not then detect it—resentment.

When he had last seen his 'little wife,' as he was wont to call her *then*, she was a madcap girl, with all her golden hair flying far and wide from a pearly neck and brow, rippling and unconfined. Now her braided hair was of the richest brown, and she was the belle of a London season, and he could not help acknowledging in his heart the many charms she possessed, and suddenly becoming very appreciative thereof.

'I hope Mr. Holcroft is enjoying his sport among the hills?' said she, after another pause.

'Never mind Holcroft,' replied Allan, a little piqued by her manner; 'have you no welcome for me, Olive?'

'Of course you are glad to be home again,' said she, evasively.

'I have always loved dear old Dundargue, even when I came home as a boy from school, and now I shall love it more than ever.'

'Why?'

'Can you ask me—when you are its permanent inmate?'

'I may not be so always,' said she, pointedly. 'Nothing lasts for ever; but as we are cousins—' she was about to add something, yet paused.

'And *more* than mere cousins can ever be to each other. You might at least give me your hand, Olive,' said he, drawing

nearer to her as she looked up at him, earnestly, shyly, and then, he began to think, rather defiantly, with those wonderful violet-grey eyes of hers. She gave him her right hand, and, though cased in a tight glove, a soft and warm little hand it felt; but he drew her towards him, and, ere she could avert the act, was softly and swiftly kissed by him.

'*Don't*,' she exclaimed, as she snatched her fingers from his clasp. 'How dare you?' she added, repelling him with both hands outspread, and a laughing indignation that was *not* all laughter; but he looked at the sweet red lips as though he longed to offend again.

'Olive, how can you treat me thus, after all these years?' he asked, with an emotion of annoyance. 'Have you forgotten what jolly playmates we used to be; how we went nutting and seeking birds' nests together, made rag dolls, and chorused

"Alexander, King of Macedon," and so forth, with our old nurse, Nannie Mackinnon, the wife of Dugald Glas?'

'I have not forgotten; but I had thought, or hoped, that you had done so.'

'Why?'

'I cannot say,' replied the wilful beauty, pouting and yet confessing in her secret heart how handsome he looked, and how winning he was in eye and manner.

'I remember, too,' said he, laughingly, 'the scores of times we used to wander in the garden, or on the heather braes, seeking bees to *blob* and get the honey out of them; and when on May mornings you used to catch a snail by the horns, and toss it over your left shoulder as an omen of luck in marriage.'

'Allan, such odious and absurd things should be forgotten.'

'We were children, then; and what

fun we had when fishing with tinnies in the burn for minnows and pow-wowits under the old brig-stone. Do you remember how I used to climb to get birds' nests for you, and how we wove fairy caps of rushes and bluebells in many a green howe of the Sidlaw Hills?'

'How can you treasure such childish memories, Allan?' she asked, but with momentary softness in her manner.

'Because such were very dear to me when far away in other lands and other scenes, when the Indian sky was like a sheet of heated iron overhead, and the breeze that came from the sandy desert was like the breath of the death-blast; when cattle perished by the empty tanks, the birds sat on the dusty trees with eyes closed and beaks agape, and when strong soldiers died on the line of march, stricken down by sunstroke or sheer exhaustion.'

'Poor Allan!'

'And you are going to the village?' said he, inquiringly, seeing that she manifested no desire to return with him.

'Yes.'

'But won't you accompany me home, now that I have returned?'

'You must excuse me—I do so enjoy a walk in the evening before dinner.

'I have not seen my mother for seven years,' he said, reproachfully; 'yet, if you will permit me to accompany you to the village, I shall do so, and then escort you home.'

'I cannot trespass on your time so much,' she replied, with a slight *soupçon* of sarcasm in her tone; 'besides, what would Aunt Aberfeldie think of your being in no haste to see her, after lingering so long at the deer-forest?'

Allan thought rightly that he now detected the true source of her pique and peculiar greeting; but he knew nothing yet of her bitter opposition to the terms of her father's will.

'Aunt and Eveline are anxiously waiting you, so do not let me detain you longer. If an escort back is requisite, I shall doubtless find one with ease,' and, nodding her head smilingly, she tripped down the tree-shaded avenue and left him; thus he had no choice, though looking after her with a sigh, but to remount and ride towards the house, or rather the castle, of Dundargue.

So—so she had so little interest in him, in his return and his society—that she would neither turn back with him nor permit him to escort her, but had left him to pay some trumpery visits which she could do at any other time, day, or hour.

'How was this?' he asked of himself. 'Holcroft has certainly something to do

with it. Why the deuce did my father bring the fellow here ?'

Allan's hitherto languid interest in her had become quickened by the sight of her undoubted beauty and grace, and he was, perhaps, a little unreasonably piqued by her open indifference as to his return from remote foreign service, and to his views and whole affairs. Thus the breach between these two—if such we may call it—seemed likely to widen.

In a few minutes more the affectionate effusiveness of the welcome home accorded him by his mother and his tender sister consoled him, but it contrasted in his mind powerfully and painfully with that of his cousin ; yet he could scarcely expect that she would have flung her soft arms round his neck and kissed him again and again with hungry affection on both cheeks as they did.

'The pater, dear old fellow, will be

home in the course of a day or two,' said he. 'Mr. Holcroft is coming with him, and Stratherroch, of Ours, too,' he added.

He noticed that Eveline's pale cheek coloured for a moment at the name of the latter.

'Ah, you know him, it seems?' said he.

'Yes, very well,' replied Eveline, frankly.

'He has been at home with the dépôt lately. A right good sort is Evan Cameron, but desperately hard up, poor lad. I often think he will have to exchange for India or something of that kind, though it would break his heart to leave the Black Watch.'

Eveline's long lashes drooped as her brother said this, all unconscious that his casual remarks were secretly wounding her.

The expression he could plainly detect in the sweet and expressive face of his sister at the mention of Evan Cameron gave Allan some occasion for thought.

He loved and esteemed his friend and brother-officer, but felt it would be a serious misfortune indeed if any affection took root between him and Eveline; for Evan was poor, as we have hinted, his estate valueless to him, and 'at nurse;' and there was, moreover, a necessity for Eveline making a wealthy marriage—indeed, her father, Lord Aberfeldie, had already a suitor in view for her.

'I am so sorry that our dear Olive is out,' said Allan's mother, breaking a little pause; 'but we knew not at what hour to expect you.'

'I met her in the avenue——'

'And you knew each other—how strange!' exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie, with a brightening face.

'Yes, after a minute or two. She seems as charming a girl as one—to use a soldier's phrase—might see in the longest day's march.'

'And such she is. She did not turn back with you?'

'No, mother,' he replied, with hesitation.

'But she was, of course, glad to see you?'

'I can't say that she was particularly, mater dear; and she got into a regular pet because I dared to kiss her, even in a cousinly way.'

'Dared, my darling boy!' exclaimed his mother, indignantly.

'Fact, mater,' said the Master, smiling and twirling up the ends of his long dark moustaches.

Lady Aberfeldie and her daughter exchanged a swift and mutual glance; but the latter knew more of the views of the young lady in question than the former did.

'I am glad you are pleased with Olive,' said she; 'and when your acquaintance is fully resumed you will find the dear girl all you could wish.'

'She has wonderful blue-grey eyes; they seem violet-blue when she smiles, and black when she is angry.'

'Angry?' said Lady Aberfeldie, inquiringly.

'Well, she rather looked so when I ventured to kiss her in the avenue,' said Allan, laughing, and referring to a kiss that, though snatched, he was never to forget, perhaps, in the long years that were to come.

'She has grown the very image of her mother, your poor Aunt Muriel, who was one of my bridesmaids.'

By visits to the minister's manse and elsewhere Olive had wilfully and petulantly contrived to protract her absence from home to the last moment; the dressing-bell had rung, and before dinner she was hastily giving a few touches to her costume —not that she cared to attract her cousin

(quite the reverse)—but she dismissed her foreign maid, Clairette Patchouli, on a sign that Eveline wished to talk with her alone.

'Now, Olive,' began the latter, 'that you have seen Allan——'

'I saw him years ago,' interrupted Olive, pettishly.

'He was a boy then; but now that he is a man, and not the boy you remember, what do you think of him?'

Olive made no reply, but continued to slip her bangles on the whitest, roundest, and most taper pair of arms that ever bewildered the senses of man.

'Isn't he very handsome?' persisted Eveline.

'To partial eyes, perhaps, but there are plenty of men in the world quite as handsome—even more so, I doubt not. I like him already, but don't let him think so; besides, I also like our English visitor, Mr. Holcroft.'

'I do *not!*' said Eveline, decisively.

'Why?'

'He is horsey in bearing, and his face, though handsome, I grant you, often wears a sinister, sharp, and supercilious expression.'

'How tanned Allan is by the Indian sun!'

'I think his face and head both grand and handsome!' exclaimed his sister, with affectionate enthusiasm; 'he quite reminds me of the old Greeks.'

'I was not aware you knew any of them,' laughed Olive.

'Their sculptures, I mean,' replied Eveline, as they swept down the great staircase to the dining-room.

CHAPTER V.

OLIVE AND ALLAN.

A FEW days had now passed since Allan Graham's return to Dundargue, but he seemed—though greatly attracted by his cousin Olive, and in a manner compelled to think of her as something more than a mere cousin—to make no progress in her favour at all. Sometimes he smoked beside her in utter silence, while she swung in a hammock between two trees on the lawn, deep—or affecting to be so—in the last three-volume novel that had come in the box from Edinburgh; and, when they stole furtive glances at each other, his were

curious and hers, under the shadow of her gorgeous Japanese umbrella, were hostile, defiant at least, and thus not without a certain drollery; but few remarks were interchanged of a more exciting nature than that 'the weather was lovely,' or 'the leaves were falling.'

In these days, and for long after, Olive was terribly uncertain in her moods, and to Allan Graham it seemed at times as if she almost disliked him.

When they were alone together, which was seldom, she scarcely spoke to him, and thus his enforced silence disposed her to be more silent still. To Olive the whole situation was one of miserable unrest; she felt that there was something grotesque in it, and she longed intensely to be anywhere else than at Dundargue.

While Allan, admiring her rare beauty and pretty, petulant ways, was already learning to love her, he found his tongue

loaded, as it were, tied up, and his tenderness cramped by the strange tenor of her father's will, which made him feel that, love her as he might, that love would never seem pure, or without the taint of selfishness.

He had procured for her at Malta a complete suite of gold and pearl-mounted Maltese jewellery, the best that could be found in the Strada San Paoli, costing him more than even he could well afford; but now so cold and repellant was her demeanour that he had not the courage as yet to present the elaborate trinkets—so rich in fretwork and fine as a gossamer web—so they were left to repose in their purple velvet cases.

Yet his thoughts about her were becoming persistent now. Times there were when he conceived that he would treat her judiciously, but tenderly, and in such a fashion that her feelings must slide into a

species of sisterly, or at least cousinly, interest in him ; but then—at these times —a flash of her dark grey-blue eyes cast these intentions to the winds, though Allan began to feel nothing but passionate love for her.

To him, as to her, the situation imparted an awkwardness now, that of course he had never been conscious of when a boy. He did not want the money of his cousin or of anyone else, as he muttered to himself while tugging and twisting his thick, dark moustache ; and thus, with all the tenderness that was growing in his heart for Olive, he often unconsciously adopted towards her a studied courtesy and almost indifferent bearing that somewhat galled her ready pride, and made her think 'this indifference to me, and the beauty all men aver I possess, can only spring from a love he bears some one else ; and, with that love in his heart, he seems actually ready

to conform to the outrageous wishes of papa!'

And more convinced of this suspicion did she become when she found that he evinced no more desire to seek her society than that of his mother or sister; but this was the result of her own bearing.

Allan was ere long in sore perplexity. The slightest attempt at tenderness she repelled or seemed to shrink from, as a sensitive plant shrinks from the touch; and, on the other hand, the lack of it seemed to increase her coldness and rouse her sense of pride.

'What the deuce is the meaning of this?' muttered Allan, as he chanced upon a volume one day. It was a very handsome and expensive edition of some of Byron's poems, which had been given by Hawke Holcroft to Olive as a birthday gift, and on turning over the leaves of which he found innumerable paragraphs

and lines pencilled on pages that seemed to fall naturally open, where these marks, all of which referred to love and passion, were most plentiful.

All of these seemed to have been selected with an ulterior view for her perusal and study. Allan knit his brows and tossed the volume to the other side of the table.

'So, so,' thought he, 'Cousin Olive has had a guide for her reading, and the guide is that fellow Holcroft. He has made good use of his time, hang him!'

Olive, who had been watching him under the deep fringes of her eyes, smiled when she saw the action, and, instantly divining the reason of it, resolved not to leave her Byron lying about in future; and now a new mood seized her.

'Tell me, Allan,' she said, suddenly looking up from a piece of music she was studying, 'did you ever think of me at

all when you were all these years far away in India?'

'Have you forgotten what I told you on the evening we met on the lawn?' said he, reproachfully, yet surprised by her taking the initiative in a conversation, especially of this kind. 'Often, indeed, did I think of you!'

'How—in what fashion?'

'As my merry little playmate when I was a mere youth—the droll girl to whom I was somehow tied up under Uncle Raymond's will.'

'You phrase it rightly,' said she, biting her coral nether lip. 'Tied up; yes, but I won't be so. Yet you did think of me as a droll little playmate?'

'Yes; how else could I think of you? Not as the lovely girl I find you now, Olive.'

'You may know by this time that I hate all flattery,' said she, blushing hotly at

what she had brought upon herself by a blunt reference to a hitherto ignored subject—their mutual relation to each other.

'I have here a gift I brought you from India,' observed Allan, timidly, as he unlocked his desk and thought of the Maltese ornaments, but did not dare refer to them as yet.

'A gift?' said she, coldly, with face half averted.

'A little silver idol of Siva, beautifully carved and chased—will you accept of it?'

'Thanks—with pleasure,' said she, trembling lest it had been a ring. 'How curious, and yet how grotesquely hideous it is!' she added, turning it round, and then balancing it in the white palm of a slim and delicate hand.

'And rather a curious story attends it—if you care to hear.'

'Please to tell me,' said she, her curiosity roused. 'Why, the funny thing has

ever so many heads, and a dozen of arms at least!'

'We were in cantonments at Hurdwur, in Delhi,' said Allan, glad to secure her attention even for a few minutes, 'when a subadar-major of the 10th Native Infantry, a disciple of Siva, wishing to sacrifice to his little idol, placed it by the bank of the river there, which is one of the greatest places for Hindoo purification, and the resort of thousands of pilgrims from every part of Hindostan. While he turned aside to get the ghee with which to anoint it, some person adroitly carried it off. After searching for it in vain, with consternation in his soul, the unfortunate subadar-major went to the priest of the nearest temple, and, with tears in his eyes, related his loss.

'"Dog!" exclaimed the priest, "you have lost your god, and must prepare to die, for death alone can soothe the wrath of Siva."

'"If die I must," replied the wretched subadar-major, with clasped hands and trembling knees, though a brave man, as the medals on his breast proved, "it shall be by drowning in the holy river; so come with me to the edge thereof, and give me your blessing."

'The priest consented, and followed him to the Ganges, into which he went deliberately.

'"Be courageous, my son—die with joy, and perfect happiness awaits you," exclaimed the priest.

'"My dear master," said the subadar, "before I perish, lend me *your* god that I may adore it—the water is already up to my neck."

'The priest consented, and handed his idol to the subadar-major, who, as if by accident, let it drop in the deep water.

'"Ah! master," he exclaimed, as if in horror and dismay, "what a new mis-

fortune! Your god is also lost, and so we must die together—for *you* must drown, too, and go with me to the throne of Siva!"

'And, approaching the priest, he strove to grasp the hand of the latter, who stood pale and trembling on the lowest step of the ghaut or landing-place.

'"What trash do you speak?" the priest suddenly exclaimed, in great wrath; "can there be any harm in losing a little image of baked clay, not worth an anna! I have dozens of such in my temple close by; let us each choose one, and keep silence on the subject!"

'The subadar did so then, but chose this fine silver one, which he bestowed on me for kindness shown to him when dying of a wound received in a skirmish, and I brought it home as a bauble for you, Cousin Olive.'

She placed the idol on the table, and

remained silent, while Allan eyed her wistfully.

'Why is my presence so distasteful to you?' he asked, after a minute's pause.

'Distasteful! Oh! Allan, don't say so,' said she, impressed by the pathos of his tone, but for a moment only; 'it is you who think, or seem to think so.'

'Olive!' he exclaimed, a little impatiently and reproachfully as he drew near her.

'There—there—that will do,' said she, starting up, 'don't bring down the ceiling on me—auntie more than all!'

And she swept from the room, leaving the idol behind her.

Allan sighed with annoyance, and addressed her no more during the whole of that day. She was conscious of this, for she remarked to Lady Aberfeldie in the evening,

'How odd—how strange Cousin Allan is to me!'

'Strange?'

'Yes, aunt.'

'I know not what you mean, Olive,' she replied, a little gravely and severely; 'but to me it seems that *you* are always strange, and not my son, the Master.'

Lady Aberfeldie had a soft, but set face of the classic type, with a mouth that, though beautiful and aristocratic, could become very fixed in expression at times, and it seemed so now to Olive, thus that young lady withdrew.

'Our Allan is young and handsome, noble and most unselfishly in love with her, as I am beginning to hope, Eveline, so what more would Olive Raymond wish for?' said Lady Aberfeldie to her daughter.

'She would have that, which she has not, mamma, perfect freedom to accept or refuse whom she chose. Unselfish in love I know Allan must be; but that is precisely the point which Olive is left to doubt.'

'Wherefore?'

'Through that unlucky will, which makes a kind of bondswoman of her.'

'I would to heaven the silly document had never been framed! I have often feared that it might lead to all our attention, care, and affection being misconstrued by her; but Allan might have been sickly, weakly, even deformed, and, with the terms of this will hanging over her, what would she have thought then?'

'Then, as I have heard her say, the will might be reduced by a court of law.'

At this reply a clouded expression came into the fair, colourless face of Lady Aberfeldie, but just then a servant in the Graham livery, yellow and black, approached with a note on a salver.

'From papa!' she said, while cutting it open with a mother-of-pearl knife. 'Just a line or two to say he will be home in a couple of days, and is certainly bringing

with him Mr. Hawke Holcroft, "the son of his old friend," and that other young detrimental, Stratherroch. He is well-nigh penniless, but, with your papa, to be in the Black Watch is quite equal to a patent of nobility.'

Eveline felt her colour fade, while a sad expression stole over her soft face, and her mother, after glancing at her narrowly, added,

'He also brings our wealthy friend, Sir Paget Puddicombe, the M.P. for Slough-cum-Sloggit, in Yorkshire. You remember him in London last season, and how much he admired you, dear?'

Eveline *did* remember him, and how the rich but elderly baronet's attentions, encouraged by her parents, were the ridicule of her girl friends and the bane of her existence; yet she only sighed and remained silent, and, passing through a French window, quitted the drawing-room to join

her brother, who was smoking a cigar on the terrace, and teasing the peacocks as they sat on the stately balustrade.

He was in rather a similar mood. He felt the demeanour of Olive after the little episode of the idol keenly, and, remembering the pencilled Byron, was, of course, inclined to connect Hawke Holcroft with that demeanour; so he had certainly become, for a time, cold and constrained in manner to his cousin.

'When was that photo of Olive done?' he asked, rather abruptly.

'The one in the ball dress?'

'Yes.'

'When we were last in Edinburgh; but I do not remember where the studio was.'

'She gave one to that Mr. Holcroft.'

'I was quite unaware that she did so,' said Eveline, with some annoyance of manner.

'Look here, Eve, if, when in London,'

grumbled Allan, 'she shies her photos about in this fashion they will soon be in every fellow's possession, and we may, ere long, expect to find them, like those of professional beauties, on glove and match-boxes.'

'What a funny and horrid idea!' said his sister, passing her arm through his and nestling her head on his shoulder, while he, stooping, kissed her *mignonne* face with a smiling caress.

'There is nothing funny about it,' he replied, though, like her, he could little foresee the trouble that unlucky photograph was to cost in the future. 'And, to say the least of it, Olive treats me with almost hostility at times.'

'She does not conceal from me a resentment at her lack of free will.'

'As for Uncle Raymond's arrangements, I would to goodness that he had left all he had to his old housekeeper and her

infernal screeching cockatoo with the yellow tuft.'

'Certainly Olive does not seem to be the kind of girl to be disposed of against her wish, Allan; you may read that in the firm tread of her little feet, in the carriage of her head, and the perfect possession of her manner.'

'But surely she may be won—though she will not understand me.'

'I hope she will ere long; but is there not a writer who says, Allan, that while the world lasts the difficulty of women understanding and making allowance for the feelings of men in what pertains to love, "will be probably one of the great sources of darkness and confusion in the social arrangement of things."'

'What a dear little casuist it is,' said he, as she raised her *petite* figure on tip-toe to kiss his well-tanned cheek; 'but,' he added, 'I am in a state of great uncertainty.'

'Uncertainty can always be ended; but then perhaps how bitterly—how very bitterly,' replied Eveline, who was not without some harrowing thoughts of her own; and something in her tone caused Allan to regard her soft hazel eyes, and sweet, shy face, with tenderness and inquiry.

'Of what are you thinking, or of—*whom?*' he whispered, as his arm went caressing round her, and he stroked her bright, sheeny hair.

'I may trust you, Allan?' she said, in a broken voice.

'To death, *petite*. You are thinking of —of Evan Cameron?'

Eveline sobbed now.

'Has he spoken of love to you?' asked Allan, in a low voice, and with a troubled expression in his face.

'Never; he knows it would be hopeless,' she replied, huskily.

'Poor Evan! and the governor is bring-

ing him again—a grand mistake! How the deuce is all this to end with us? But don't sob so, my little darling,' he added, as he drew her closer to him.

Yet, despite her brother's sympathy and tenderness, Eveline Graham let her tears flow freely, and he promised to keep her secret that she and Evan Cameron cherished an unspoken and hopeless love for each other; and in a brief space they were to meet again!

Meanwhile, though somewhat relieved by having her brother for a confidant, she was both restless and unhappy. She strolled upon the terrace to feed the peacocks, or wandered listlessly in the garden, going from occupation to occupation, taking up a book—one of Mudie's last—only to toss it aside; seated herself before the piano, rose then and left it. Anon she resorted to her sketching-block, sorted her colours, selected a brush, only to quit any attempt to work with a hopeless sigh.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHAGRIN OF LOVE.

Lord Aberfeldie duly arrived at Dundargue with his three gentlemen visitors, their approach being heralded by the pipes of Ronald Gair, who was perched on a seat of the game-laden wagonette as it bowled up the avenue.

On the first day of his return the peer was anxious to learn upon what footing the cousins were—if Allan had made a proposal, or 'even opened the trenches,' and if so, with what success. On these points he was enlightened by Lady Aberfeldie, and, though not very much surprised

to find matters as they were, he trusted to propinquity and cousinly feeling of intercourse, as trump cards in the game, and was sure that all would come right in the end, and before Allan's leave of absence was out.

There was no selfishness in this desire of Lord Aberfeldie. He had no power to alter the matter as it stood, for if she did not marry Allan if he was willing to marry her, 'then and in that case,' as the will had it, her patrimony would be lost even to herself. Allan's death alone would save it for her.

Great indeed, thought the girl with bitterness, must have been her father's regard for the house of Aberfeldie!

'What friends—such lovers we might be but for the confounded plans of that eccentric old fellow!' was the ever-recurring thought of Allan.

'You are at least fond of her?' said the

peer, as he and his son smoked their cigars together on the terrace that overlooked the far-stretching vista of the Carse of Gowrie, then bathed in the ruddy splendour of the setting sun.

'Fond of Olive! Yes, as much as she will permit me to be. She is my cousin, of course,' replied Allan.

'There is something evasive—doubtful—in your answer; but you must at some time or other propose to her. You know precisely the terms of her father's remarkable will.'

'Yes, and that it hangs like a millstone round the necks of us both, rendering what may be the dearest wish of our hearts liable, perhaps, to the grossest misconstruction. She has more than once told Eveline that to gain freedom of action she would face poverty—anything.'

'Tuts! Romantic rant! Much *she* knows of what poverty is. But why

should she even think of facing it?'

'To be free and unfettered, as I have said.'

'Relinquishing to you all that portion of her fortune which does not go to charitable institutions?'

'Yes.'

'Poor girl! A silly and impetuous threat. But she will think better of it, Allan, by-and-by, and we have fully five years to count upon yet.'

But it did not seem as if the fair Olive was likely to change her mind soon, to judge by her bearing that evening, when, after dinner, the guests and family at Dundargue assembled in the drawing-room.

The repast was over, and thereafter, ere the ladies withdrew, Ronald Gair, with all his drones in order, his Crimean, Indian, and Ashanti medals glittering on his breast, had marched thrice round the

table, according to his daily wont, in 'full fig,' looking as only a Highland piper or a peacock can look; and, to the amazement of Sir Paget Puddicombe and the disgust of Hawke Holcroft, winding up 'The Birks of Aberfeldie' by several warlike skirls at the back of his master's chair—the dinner, we say, was over, and the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the stately drawing-room, which was lighted by more than one glittering chandelier.

Lord Aberfeldie, his son, and Strather-roch, as they wore the kilt, had, of course, substituted for their rough shooting-jackets others of black cloth, with the irreproachable white vests and ties as evening costume, and had also assumed their silver-mounted dirks; while Holcroft and one or two more were *de rigueur* in the funereal attire, which a writer calls 'the butler-suit, the most hideous clothing yet hit upon by our species.'

In that brilliant drawing-room, grouped with well-bred people, were some curious elements of secret doubt and future discord that did not quite meet the eye.

Holcroft hung over the chair of Olive so closely that, at times, the tip of his long and waxed tawny moustache nearly touched her head, while she played with her fan, opening and shutting it listlessly as they conversed in low tones, he adopting a sentimental one, though it was ever his boast that he 'was not one of those fools who hoard by them dried flowers, locks of hair, and all that sort of thing.'

Quietly watched by Lady Aberfeldie, whose lips wore their set expression, Evan Cameron was entirely occupied with her daughter, while Allan seemed quite as intent on a new guest, Miss Logan of Loganlee, a girl possessed of considerable personal attractions; and his father talked politics with Loganlee himself, the parish

minister, and Sir Paget Puddicombe, a short, pompous, and squat, but rather pleasant little man, with a prematurely bald head, which he had a way of jerking forward from his neck like a turtle, a rubicund face, two merry eyes, and whose age was rather doubtful, but too old any way for a girl of Eveline Graham's years, though he affected considerable juvenility of manner.

Lord Aberfeldie, who generally about that time, when at Dundargue, was wont to enjoy a quiet little game of chess or bezique with Olive or Eveline, was rather bored by the *empressement* with which the clergyman, Sir Paget, and Loganlee discussed politics and the prospects of the ministry.

The latter, a sombre man, whose air of respectability was almost oppressive, was one of a style of men common enough in Scotland. A small landed proprietor, he

had contrived to become M.P. in the Liberal interest for a cluster of Scottish burghs (each of which, if in England, would have had two members), and he was chiefly noted—being 'Parliament House bred'—for neglecting Scottish interests and toadying to the Lord-Advocate, and consequently obtained the usual legal reward, a sheriffship, or something of that kind, with a thousand a year or so.

He seldom opened his mouth, save to talk on politics; he was tall and thin, with very square shoulders, grizzled, sandy, mutton-chop whiskers, apple-green eyes, and nothing more about him remarkable, save a curious air of perpetual self-assertion, combined, as we have said, with an oppressive one of respectability.

His host began to change the tenor of the conversation by hoping that Sir Paget found his quarters comfortable last night, adding that he occupied 'the Johnson Room.'

'Why is it so called?' asked Sir Paget, jerking forward his bald head.

'Dr. Johnson slept a night in Dundargue when on his famous tour.'

'Of which Boswell makes no mention?' said Mr. Logan, inquiringly.

'Because my ancestor did not pay *him* sufficient deference; and, indeed, I fear we should scarcely ever have heard of the literary bear of Bolt Court and Fleet Street but for that Scotch toady of his. Though he alleged that the most valuable piece of timber in Scotland was his walking-stick, he might have seen some fine trees at the Birks of Aberfeldy. We must ride over there, Sir Paget, and I will show you the cradle of the Black Watch, my old regiment of immortal memory.'

'How?'

'It was first mustered there on the 25th of October, 1739.'

'Ah!' said Sir Paget, who was not so

much interested in the matter as the speaker.

Sir Paget was a childless widower, and had been left a noble fortune in many ways, including nearly the whole of Slough-cum-Sloggit, of which his father rose by his own merits to be mayor. He had entered the town a tattered lad, with only a sixpence in his pocket, and, in due time, the sixpence became the basis of colossal wealth. He had been made a baronet by the ministry of the day—no one knew precisely for what; but the wealth he left behind him gave his son an interest in the eyes of Lady Aberfeldie he was unlikely to attain in the soft hazel orbs of her daughter.

Sir Paget generally stood with his chest puffed out, reminding one of a pouter-pigeon, his little, fat hands interlaced behind his back, and often as not under the tails of his coat, his round, good-

humoured face and twinkling eyes turned up to the faces of those with whom he conversed, as most men, and women, too, had the advantage of him in stature.

With a gold *pince-nez* balanced on his very pug nose, he was what young ladies described as 'an absurd little man' whose tender speeches they laughed at—none more than Eveline—till matters took a serious turn, though he failed to feel the truth of the aphorism, 'Let no lover cherish sanguine hopes when the object of his choice has grown to look upon him in the light of the ridiculous.'

Evan Cameron, we have said, sighed for Eveline; hopeless as his undeclared love had been, the presence of the wealthy English baronet, in conjunction with certain rumours he had heard, made it more hopeless than ever; and, unattractive though Sir Paget's years and figure, he felt intuitively that in him he had a dangerous rival.

When he found that this most eligible *parti* was again on the *tapis*—one whose name had been associated with that of Eveline in at least one 'society' paper during the last London season, poor Strath-erroch's heart sank down to zero. He felt and knew that, with Lady Aberfeldie especially, he was literally 'nowhere' by his want of wealth, though, like a true Highlander, he could trace his lineage back into the misty times of Celtic antiquity; but, aristocratic though she was, the peeress set little store on that.

Eveline Graham seemed as much beyond his reach as the moon. He felt that, for his own peace of mind, he ought to quit Dundargue as soon as possible, yet he clung desperately to the perilous delight of the girl's society.

To all appearance, the pair were simply looking over, almost in silence, a large book of clear-skied and strongly-shadowed

photos of Indian scenery brought home by Allan, yet both their hearts had but a single thought, and, when the downward glance of his soft grey eyes met hers, she felt that, in spite of herself, there was something in it like a magnetic spell.

Passionate and pleading eyes they were, generous and loving in expression, telling the tale his lips had not yet uttered, and might never do so; and the girl lowered her white lids as if a weight oppressed them, and the diamond locket on her white bosom sparkled as a sigh escaped her.

A little way off, in something of the same pose, Hawke Holcroft, with a glass in his pale, sinister eye, was hanging, as we have said, over Olive Raymond, doing his utmost in *sotto voce* to fascinate that young lady, while pretending to translate, as suited the occasion and himself, for the edification of his fair listener, the lettering of one of the Chinese or Japanese

fans that were strewed about the tables.

Now, Mr. Hawke Holcroft knew nothing about the terms of Mr. Raymond's will, or of the existence of any such document, and might never know. He was only certain that Olive was undoubtedly an heiress; that he himself was very impecunious, and ere long might be well-nigh desperate; and so he did not see why he should not, to use his own horsey phraseology, 'enter stakes as well as another.'

Rumour, certainly, had linked the names of the cousins together; 'but if she is engaged to Graham,' thought the observant Holcroft, 'it is strange that she wears no engagement ring.'

He knew not that, separated as the pair had been almost from childhood, no such little formality as the presentation of a ring could have been gone through; and *now*, as the Master did not see his way to it as yet, Holcroft was 'scoring,' or thought so.

He was leaving nothing unsaid to enchain her attention. He seemed very clever: at least he could converse fluently on many subjects; seemed to have been everywhere and to have seen everything worth seeing, or pretended to have done so, which was most likely.

'However they stand, her heart is not in it,' was his ever-recurring thought; 'and if so, why the deuce shouldn't I try my hand? She has a pot of money—indeed, no end of money, I hear; but, then, if her noble aunt and uncle have made up their noble minds to pounce upon her as a daughter-in-law, how is she to resist, unless she elopes, if "Barkis" (meaning Allan) "is willin'"? They can make her life a burden to her until she gives in, or—or I run away with her, and why the devil should I not?'

Holcroft was an artful man, and well acquainted with every phase of dissipated

life; he had suave manners when he chose and an unexceptionable appearance. With many debts and secret passions, he was cold and selfish; a man who never made a move in any way without forecast and calculation; and who might commit a crime if driven to it, but never precisely a folly.

He was closely watching Olive while he conversed with her; he admired her beautiful person, but still more her ample purse. She dared to trifle with him at times, he thought; and then, even when looking down upon her satin-like hair, her dazzling white shoulders and innocent violet eyes, with a vengeful feeling he mentally vowed that he would *compel* her to love him, or accept him, he cared not which, if human will and cunning failed him not!

He had a love—a passion for her—in a strange fashion of his own, yet times there were when he almost hated her for fencing with him; and little could the soft, bright

beauty, who raised her fine eyes from time to time to his and conversed so laughingly with him, have conceived the conflicting emotions that were concealed in his breast under a smiling exterior, or the shame and agony he was yet to cost her.

Even when he attempted to look loving, there were a cold expression and lack of colour in his eyes, and there was something very significant of an iron will about his lips and powerful chin.

Olive had no warm feeling for Holcroft, and save for the obnoxious will would infinitely have preferred her cousin Allan in the end; but she affected just then to believe in Platonic friendship (blended with a little judicious flirtation) so firmly that, to pique Allan, she showed a great apparent preference for his would-be rival.

Olive and Holcroft knew that this seeming flirtation was perilous work, and might

compromise them both with Lord and Lady Aberfeldie, and with Allan, too, if it attracted attention; but Holcroft had a game to play. Olive's proud little heart was full of resentment and pique, and then anything with a spice of danger in it is always curiously fascinating.

More than all, Olive was beginning to feel conscious that, under the circumstances, it was strangely awkward to be in the same house with Allan Graham—the intended husband to whom her father had bequeathed her. But whither could she go?

In more than one instance, in the drawing-room at Dundargue, that night was illustrated the aphorism that language is given us to conceal our thoughts, and much was exhibited of what the French not inaptly term the *chagrin* or peevishness of love.

CHAPTER VII.

LE CHAGRIN D'AMOUR.

Allan Graham, with all his quiet and growing love for Olive, seeing how she received him, neither petted her as he was wont to do in his boyhood, nor after a time had attempted any tenderness with her; but trusted to the progress of events and the necessity for fulfilling her father's wish rather than to his own influence or power of persuasion, aware that she could only become the bride of another, penniless, or nearly so, a circumstance which militated sadly against himself.

But this assumed coldness and calmness

withal, Olive could feel, with a woman's acuteness in such matters, how much the expression of his dark eyes and the tone of his voice changed and softened, unconsciously, when he looked at and addressed her. She was of his own blood, like a sister, whom he might treat with formality or affection, coldly or playfully, according to the occasion or the mood, and whom he might love as much as he liked, or she would permit. Ah! this tender and mysterious tie of cousinship must give him, as he thought, 'a great pull' over Hawke Holcroft, and every other man.

On this evening, how handsome she looked, in all her wilfulness! How Allan longed that he might take her in his embrace, to kiss her starry eyes, her peach-like cheek, and sheeny hair with an ardour he had never felt in his boyhood, when he had done so many times; but now, somehow, he dared scarcely think of

such a thing, and there was that fellow Holcroft, with all his easy *insouciance*, and with the smile of one who never laughed really in his life, hanging just rather too much over her, with a considerable amount of *empressement* in his eyes and manner, pouring his flowery nothings into her apparently willing ear, and Lady Aberfeldie, who could stand this no longer, became secretly provoked, and opened and shut her fan of heavy mother-of-pearl with such vehemence that the sticks rattled.

And, with the emotions we have described in his heart, Allan, as if the further to play out the game of cross-purposes, in a spirit of pique, doubtless, remained in close attendance on Miss Ruby Logan.

Now the latter was not the heiress of Loganlee, as she had several brothers; but, even had she been so, it would not have enhanced her value in the ambitious estimation of Lady Aberfeldie.

But Ruby was a very handsome girl, with a skin pure, transparent, and delicate as the lining of a shell, while her fine hair was ample in quantity, and of the darkest amber; her eyes large, deep-blue, and fringed by dark lashes. She was large, full in form, and altogether a bright and attractive-looking girl, and Olive felt conscious that she might prove rather a formidable rival if she ever had to view her as such.

Replacing the three daughters of the minister of Dundargue, who had been afflicting the company with much boarding-school Mozart and Chopin, who would have deemed anything national vulgar, to say the least of it, compared with some lachrymose drawing-room ballad, and who in a ditty of great length and mystery, which we quote at second hand, had informed their hearers—

'Mermaids we be,
Under the blue sea'—

replacing them, we say, Ruby Logan sang to Allan in a rich mezzo-soprano voice, and with a suppressed emotion, born perhaps of a coquettish desire to dazzle and please him, as a handsome young fellow of good position, all of which proved a fresh annoyance to my Lady Aberfeldie, who deemed music at times 'a convenient noise for drowning conversation, and under whose shelter the old people talk scandal and the young people make love,' and who knew that Miss Logan, like Olive, had that wonderful charm, which is, perhaps, one of the greatest any girl can possess, a lovely and ever-changing expression; and even Allan, as he gazed down into the depths of her dark-blue eyes (while she sang *at* him), and anon glanced furtively at Olive, thought to himself,

'How the dickens *will* our little game of cross-purposes end?'

Lady Aberfeldie was just then indulg-

ing in the same surmise, as, full of watchfulness, she occupied an ottoman in the centre of the inner drawing-room, cresting up her white throat and well-shaped head; looking in her stately beauty like the heroine of some grand old Scottish romance of the days of Montrose or Prince Charles, for there was something of a past age in her style and bearing, though attired in the latest fashion by a modiste of Princes Street.

In her matronhood, Lady Aberfeldie had still that subdued charm which was not now the beauty of youth, yet stood very much in place of it; but, with all her softness of manner, she was a proud and determined woman, capable of doing much to accomplish a purpose of her own, and the marriage of Eveline to Sir Paget Puddicombe was certainly her purpose at present.

Thinking that it was high time to make

some change in the general grouping, the moment Miss Logan's musical performance was done she summoned Allan to her side by a wave of her fan.

'So glad I am that your father, who so often mistakes, invited dear Sir Paget here,' she said, in low voice.

'He is rather a good sort,' replied Allan, in his off-hand way; 'capital cellar and preserves, I have heard.'

'So rich, and not *very* old; he always admired Eveline, and she certainly cares for no one else—thus I have great hopes for her, Allan,' she added, confidently; but Allan sighed; he knew better, and recalled the tears of his gentle sister on the terrace, and her half murmured admissions of deep interest in that winsome young brother-officer, whom he loved so well; and, as he remained silent, his mother spoke again.

'Mr. Holcroft seems to be fairly absorb-

ing Olive; he has been talking to her quite long enough, and this will not do; ask her to play something at my request, and do you lead her to the piano.'

'We are anticipated,' said Allan, as he saw his sister seat herself at the instrument with young Cameron by her side, busy among the leaves of her music; and a shade of annoyance deepened in the face of Lady Aberfeldie as she glanced at her husband, whose eyes were turned also towards the pair, and she knew from personal experience how much may be inferred or deduced from the words of a song, and also how many a tender speech, an accompaniment, however ill or well executed, may conceal.

Lord Aberfeldie, of course, would never consent to Eveline having a suitor with means so limited as those of her young admirer; but, though the idea of such a contingency had not occurred to him, Lady

Aberfeldie was much sharper and more suspicious; she saw 'how the tide set,' and was much opposed to Cameron being even a visitor at Dundargue in any way, as an utter 'detrimental,' and declined to see how his being one of 'Ours'—the Black Watch—altered *that* matter.

And now, after a considerable amount of preluding, much unnecessary whispering, as 'my lady' thought, much glancing and many reciprocal smiles, Evan Cameron began to sing, accompanied by her daughter; and more annoyed became the matron on finding the theme chosen one of love and tenderness that could be, and was, sung with considerable *point*—a now forgotten little Scotch song, which the author adapted to the air of 'Rousseau's Dream,' and with the desire to excel before the girl he loved better than life, young Cameron gave his whole soul to the lyric.

'See the moon o'er cloudless Jura
Shining in the loch below;
See the distant mountain towering
Like a pyramid of snow.
Scenes of grandeur—scenes of childhood—
Scenes so dear to love and me!
Let us roam by bower and wild wood,
All is lovelier when with *thee*.

'On Jura's hills the winds are sighing,
But all is silent in the grove;
And the leaves with dewdrops glistening
Sparkle like the eye of love.
Night so calm, so clear, so cloudless,
Blessed night to love and me;
Let us roam by bower and fountain,
All is lovelier when with *thee*.'

And it was not unnoticed by Lady Aberfeldie that at the closing word of each verse the eyes of the pair unconsciously met. Ere Eveline could be prevented, she had acceded to Cameron's softly uttered desire that she would sing anything for *him;* and she frankly did so, throwing into her voice the thrill and tenderness that are sure to come into a girl's utterances

when singing to the man she loves. The heart of Cameron responded to this mysterious influence, and, as the girl regarded him furtively from time to time, she thought, with his crisp wavy hair, his clear grey eyes, general expression and bearing, he looked every inch what he was, the descendant of that Sir Evan Cameron of Lochiel who met Cromwell's men in combat under the shadow of Ben Nevis; yet to other eyes he seemed just a good sample of an infantryman who had across his forehead the genuine sunmark of his craft, made under the line of his forage-cap by a scorching tropical sun.

And now when Lady Aberfeldie, to stop any more musical performances between these two, prevailed upon Olive to replace her cousin, she was quick enough to detect that the former, displeased or piqued by Allan's apparent attention to Ruby Logan, swept past him with the most

subtle little touch of disdain in the carriage of her handsome head.

Now Cameron had once more to give place to pudgy little Sir Paget, who—puffing out his chest and jerking forward his bald shining head—began to do his best to make himself pleasing to Eveline, while the latter, under her mother's watchful eye, was compelled to listen and appear to act with compliance and complacency; and poor Eveline, like Olive, often felt with some compunction that her mother's general bearing—which a certain quiet yet lofty dignity seemed never to forsake—was more calculated to inspire respect than love.

And Cameron, while he found himself talking rather absently on regimental matters with Lord Aberfeldie, as he looked at Eveline from time to time, was thinking sadly in his honest heart,

'Oh, what madness it is in me to love

her as I do, and how wicked if I lure her into loving me! Can I expect her ambitious mother or her calculating father ever to view with favour one so penniless as I am? Would it be honourable in me to profit by her girlish prepossession in my favour, and so preclude her from reaping those advantages of wealth, position, and rank which she is entitled to expect, and to which her parents looked forward? and alas! as the wife of Sir Paget—if such be her fate—poor Eveline will be lost for ever to me.'

His breast felt torn by such thoughts as these; and, sooth to say, it is as often amid the splendour and luxury of life, as amid its squalor and poverty, that some of its bitterest tragedies are acted out.

But now the party began to break up—the ladies to seek their respective apartments, and the gentlemen to adjourn for a time to the smoking-room.

As the two cousins, each so different in her style of loveliness, crossed the great apartment, the soft *frou-frou* of their long silken dresses seemed to mingle with their soft laughter and silvery voices. Sir Paget jerked forward his head and remarked to his hostess that 'they made a charming picture.'

Each had a sore place in her heart, but there was no appearance of it then.

Though resenting the position in which she was placed, and much inclined to resist it, Olive Raymond—such is female caprice—also resented Allan's having hovered so much about the amber-haired beauty, and, when she bade him adieu for the night, she could not help singing softly, with some point and waggery, as she glanced back at him, the lines of Tennyson's song:

'I know a maiden fair to see,
Take care!
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware, beware!
Trust her not, she is fooling thee.'

But whether she applied the words to herself or Ruby Logan it puzzled him to divine.

Olive and Eveline were of an age, and able to sympathise with each other in every thought or fancy. They had grown up together like sisters, Olive, as an orphan, doubtless being the most petted of the two by the household ever since she came a little child to Dundargue, and both were frank, both were open-hearted, and proud of each other's personal attractions; and now, dismissing their maids, they brushed out each other's shining hair that they might have a quiet gossip together.

'So ends a tiresome night,' said Eveline, shrugging her white shoulders, which shone like ivory in the light of the toilette candles: 'a night when the conversation of everyone seemed of a nature so antagonistic, or as if it was all broken up into wrong duets.'

Like her father, Eveline was anxious to

discover how the cousins were affected towards each other now; yet the course of this evening, in which Allan had plainly flirted with Ruby Logan, while Olive seemed to have been engrossed by Mr. Holcroft, did not seem to promise much, and she hinted this pretty plainly.

'I do think Holcroft loves me, or leads me to infer that he does,' said Olive, with a soft smile on her downcast face, as she took off her rings, bangles, and bracelets, and tossed them on the marble toilette-table.'

'And you—what is your feeling for him?' asked Eveline, with some anxiety in her face and tone; 'not love, I hope.'

'I don't know what I feel—perhaps it is only a girl's emotion of gratitude and vanity.'

'I hope it will never be anything more. You scarcely spoke to poor Allan to-night?' said Eveline, interogatively.

'Rather say he scarcely spoke to me! But we are fated to see quite enough of each other, I suppose,' replied Olive, as with slender fingers she coiled and knotted up the silky masses of her rich brown hair. 'How absurd it is,' she added, petulantly, 'to think, as I have said a hundred times, that I have a lover cut and dry for me—a *fiancé*—ever since he was in jackets and knickerbockers!'

After a pause, during which she was critically and approvingly regarding herself sideways in the swinging cheval-glass, she said,

'When I heard that he was returning to Dundargue, I was quite prepared to dislike him intensely.'

'Olive!'

'Fact, dear; and since then he must have been sorely puzzled by my various moods towards him.'

'You speak but with truth in this; and

yet he seems to have been somewhat the same with you.'

'Poor fellow—but ever so good and kind.'

'And—and you think, Olive dear, that you are beginning to love him as mamma wishes?'

'Nay—nay, I cannot admit that.'

'Even to me?' said Eveline, caressing her.

'Even to you. Did you not see his manner to-night with Ruby Logan?'

'To pique you, if possible, Olive; but when Allan proposes to you, as I am sure he will, and must do——'

'*Must* do!' interrupted Olive. 'Yes—there it is.'

'Well?'

'Then, and in that case, as the will has it, I shall tell him that, however I may esteem and regard him as my cousin, he can never be more, or nearer, or dearer than as such.'

Eveline sighed and smiled; but she told this reply next day to Allan, and hence he became less in a hurry to bring matters to an issue, though love was growing in his heart, nevertheless.

'Oh, why is it that women cannot speak their minds as men do? I wish I dared run away!' exclaimed the petulant beauty, beating the carpet with a little impatient foot. 'To-day I saw two great brown eagles winging their way skyward from the rock of Dundargue; and oh! Eveline, you can't think how long and wistfully I watched them till they dwindled into tiny specks.'

'Why?'

'They seemed such free agents, and, as such, to be envied. They had no wills or last testaments made by others to control their actions—no parents to rule them in the matters of love and marriage.'

'How droll you are, Olive! To whom

but you would such speculations occur? I hope you did not express them to—to——'

'Allan?'

'Yes.'

'Not to Allan.'

'To whom then?'

'Mr. Holcroft.'

'Then, you were very wrong to do so,' said Eveline, almost severely; 'he will be certain to draw his own deductions therefrom.'

'In something else I was, I fear, wrong too.'

'How?'

'I permitted him to try one of my gold bangles—one sent me by Allan from Delhi—on his arm, and it would not come off again.'

'And the bangle?'

'Is still there,' said Olive, laughing, but not without a little emotion of alarm.

'Oh, Olive!' exclaimed Eveline, with something of dismay, 'how could you? This is worse than the photo.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIDING-PARTY.

For some time the days passed on as they generally do in a country-house like Dundargue, and there was all the usual flow of life and—with three exceptions, Sir Paget, Holcroft, and Cameron—change of guests and visitors, with the amusements wealth can give.

First came the partridge-shooting, and then the pheasants were to be knocked over, while the ladies drove almost daily to the preserves with the luncheon in the drag or large pony-carriage; there were hunting days, dinners, luncheons, musical

evenings, carpet dances, and so forth, and the inevitable lawn-tennis, with the ladies in bewitching costumes; but still Allan, damped perhaps by his sister's communications, 'made no way' with his tantalising cousin, and Hawke Holcroft, on Lord Aberfeldie's invitation, was still lingering at Dundargue.

To Allan, Olive had become a part of his life, and each day seemed only to begin when he met her at breakfast in her charming morning toilette, fresh from her bath and the hands of Mademoiselle Clairette, her hair dressed to perfection, and her face radiant with health and beauty.

'How often do I wish she had not a *sous!*' sighed Allan. 'Then she might learn that I love her for herself alone.'

The curious position in which they were placed relatively made the cousins most strange to each other, involving much constraint.

'They are fencing with their feelings,' was Lord Aberfeldie's conviction.

To Evan Cameron, however, it was evident that Holcroft was 'making all the running he could' during Allan's absences after the game, or apparent occupation with laughing Ruby Logan, while it became evident to Sir Paget and more than one other guest that he got up many a quiet game at *ecarté*—that most rooking of all games—and many a match at billiards after the ladies had retired; and it was soon remarked by the same close observers that he was a singularly successful player, often pocketing large sums, seldom losing, and then very slenderly, as if to keep up appearances.

At Dundargue he felt himself in clover! He knew, or was aware instinctively, that neither Lady Aberfeldie nor the Master cared much about him; but he also knew that his host was inspired by the kindliest

feelings towards him as the only son of an early friend and gallant old Crimean comrade who had gone to his long home.

If any rule governed the erratic life of the horsey and gambling Holcroft, it was that of resolutely shutting his eyes against to-morrow, and letting it take care of itself; and, now that there was a prospect of winning a wife with money—and such a chance seldom came his way—could he but play his cards well and surely, his fortune would be made!

He was a mass of absolute selfishness—the result either of his innate nature or of his nomadic habits. A life-long bankrupt, he had been ever readier to borrow than to lend, to smoke any other fellow's cigars than his own, and to take every advantage of the honourable and unsuspecting.

Such was the perilous inmate which a mistaken sense of kindness, gratitude, and hospitality had induced Lord Aberfeldie to

make one of the family circle at Dundargue during the shooting season; and to whom the advent of the bangle—which, though it slipped easily upon his wrist, most mysteriously would not come off it—and other adventitious circumstances, the real cause of which he did not know, gave a considerable amount of what he termed to himself 'modest assurance' and confidence of ultimate success.

'I should like to come into a nice little pot of money—a fortune, if you will—but *not* with a girl tacked to it,' he said, on one occasion, to throw Allan 'off the scent,' as he thought. 'I am neither domestic nor ambitious. A few thousands would do.'

'And make you content?'

'Content! I should feel as happy as more than once I have been at Monaco, when I have seen the croupier's rake pushing a jolly pile of gold across the

trente-et-quarante table towards me, by Jove.'

It did not occur to him that by little speeches like this and anecdotes about his own acumen in the betting ring, he let a little light in upon the general tenor of his past and present life, and, all unconscious that Sir Paget and others listened with slightly elevated eyebrows, he would produce a sealskin cigar-case of portentous dimensions, draw therefrom a great Rio Hondo cigar, and after carefully manipulating it, begin to smoke it with intense satisfaction.

Hawke Holcroft, like Mr. Micawber, was always waiting for something to 'turn up' in the way of good for himself, and now thought he had found that something in Olive Raymond—an heiress free, he deemed, to choose for herself—free to be wooed and won; and on a day when she proposed a riding-party to visit Macbeth's

Castle of Dunsinane he very nearly had the hardihood to learn his fate—in the words of Montrose's song, to put it 'to the touch, to win or lose it all.'

Drives, riding-parties, and rambles to visit artistic bits of scenery and the rural lions the neighbourhood afforded every opportunity to those who wished to cultivate each other's society at Dundargue, and the expedition proposed by Olive to visit the ruins of the ursurper's castle, proved the occasion of Mr. Hawke Holcroft's attempt to advance his own interests.

Whatever Lady Aberfeldie's views were, her husband had never been called upon to fulfil the duties of a vigilant guardian or parent, and to study the difference between 'detrimentals' and married parties, so he left the guidance of the whole affair in the hands of Allan, and remained closeted with his solicitor.

By judicious manœuvring, Holcroft contrived to pair-off with Olive, while Allan thus became the escort of Ruby Logan, and Eveline, of course, fell to Sir Paget, who soon found the truth of the vulgar adage about two being company, &c., on their being joined by Stratherroch.

It was a clear and brilliant day early in October, when the blue sky was flecked by fleecy clouds, and the far-stretching scenery of the fertile Carse, overlooked by the long chain of heights, named the Sidlaw Hills, lay steeped in sunshine.

The parks of Dundargue, with their broad acres of velvet-like turf, their stately oaks and towering beeches, among the gnarled branches of which legions of gleds were cawing to each other, and brown squirrels were gliding to and fro; their hedges of ancient thorn, and others where the hawthorn berries showed red and the wild roses were blooming—the parks, we say,

were left behind, with all their groups of deer, and the party, certainly a merry and a well-mounted one, accompanied by the staghounds Shiuloch and Bran, careering joyously on either hand, followed by a couple of splendidly-horsed grooms, cantered along the highway, and ere long broke, or fell, into that slow and ambling pace which is suited for conversing with ease. And Holcroft, who was well versed in all horsey details, and had a very appreciative eye, could see that his fair companion's *tout ensemble*, her riding costume, her hat, veil, and gauntlets were all perfect, from the coils of brown glossy hair to the little foot that rested firmly in its tiny stirrup of burnished steel; and that foot was indeed a model—arched, small, and always full of character in its elasticity of tread; and, more than all, intoxicated by the ambient air, the sunshine, her own high spirits, and the

pleasure of being mounted on her own favourite pad, Olive Raymond was looking her brightest and her best.

He had, while engaging all her attention in conversation, contrived, unknown to her, by the pacing of his horse, to leave the trio referred to at some distance behind; while, luckily for him, Allan Graham, lured on by Ruby Logan—who was something between a flirt and a hoyden—had gone ahead with her suddenly at a hand-gallop, and now the pair were out of sight.

There could be no engagement, despite all rumour thereof—not even a passing fancy—between the cousins, was now Holcroft's conviction, and of his own ultimate success with Olive he began to have little doubt, could he but warily mould her to his purpose; and already in fancy he saw her thousands—how many there were he knew not—firmly in his grasp.

Though swallowed up by mortgages, his place in Essex—or the few acres that nominally still remained to him there—caused the retention of his name among the 'landed gentry of England,' and he based much upon that circumstance as aiding his designs on Lord Aberfeldie's ward, to whom he had sometimes dropped glowing hints of possession that were not nor ever had been his.

Something undefined in Olive's manner rather encouraged him on this day. She, to show that she resented the apparent indifference of Allan as being a 'laggard in love,' even while resenting the tenor of that family compact which was meant to bind them together, was disposed to flirt with Holcroft, out of pique rather than precise preference, and to annoy Allan.

With the latter present now, Holcroft became at times a species of difficulty to Olive. During a past season in London

there had been sundry, not exactly love-passages, but little coquettings and lingerings in conservatories that nearly amounted to such; and he, in ignorance of the footing in which she was regarded by the family, was quite inclined, penniless as he was, or nearly so, to revive, if not improve, past relations; and this had been his object from the first day he came to Dundargue.

And now 'that muscular idiot the Master,' as he was in the habit of mentally calling Allan, having cantered out of sight, he addressed himself more fully to his companion and the matter in hand.

'I enjoy town to the full—none can do so more—when I am there, but I love—oh, I do love—the country!' replied Olive, in reply to a remark of Holcroft's about their last London season.

'It is always very romantic, of course, and all that sort of thing.'

'And with pleasant people about one, the country becomes so delightful for a time; and then we girls have such perfect freedom here.'

'Even an escort is not necessary at times.'

'Unless in the park—beyond that I always like to have one,' said Olive.

'Are you pleased to have *me* for one?' he asked, in a low voice, and pretty pointedly.

'Of course,' she answered, frankly.

'How charming to be at hand in case of danger!'

'What possible danger?' asked Olive, with surprise.

'Oh, the untimely appearance of an infuriated stag or the proverbial mad bull of the three-volume novel.'

'Why not a brigand or a Bengal tiger?' said Olive, laughing; then, suddenly becoming grave, she added—'But, by the

way, talking of Bengal, please to give me back my bangle.'

'Why?'

'Simply because I cannot permit you to retain it,' she replied, little foreseeing to what the natural request might lead.

'Do not deprive me of it!' he urged, softly and entreatingly.

'Why?' asked she, in return; 'for what reason. It is impossible—what may people say?'

'What they please, if seen, which it never shall be.'

'What might they not think?'

'Oh, what does it matter?' he urged again, with much would-be sadness and tenderness.

'Little to you, perhaps, but much to me,' retorted Olive; 'but I do not choose that aught should be either thought or said about it. We shall certainly be accused of flirting.'

'No, no, Miss Raymond — oh, no, Olive——'

'Olive!' she repeated, in a startled manner.

'Pardon me—none could ever accuse *me* of flirting with you—that were an impossibility—for deeper thoughts——'

'My bangle, please, Mr. Holcroft, and at once!' she said, imperatively, in dread of what more he might say.

She held forth her hand, but the trinket either would not come off his wrist, or he pretended that such was the case. Olive tried to remove it, but in vain, and glanced round her, red with vexation. Her hand was gloved, otherwise she would have felt how unpleasantly cold and clammy were the fingers of her would-be lover.

'Allow me to retain it, even for a time —though would that I might wear it in my grave—for a time, in memory of the

darling hopes I have dared to cherish,' he whispered, in a manner there could be no mistaking now.

'Spare me this melodramatic sort of thing, Mr. Holcroft,' said Olive, growing rather pale; 'I cannot—must not listen to you.'

'Why—what do you mean?'

'That there are obstacles between us, even were there not the want of liking,' she replied, decidedly, but with an agitated voice.

'Obstacles?' he repeated, inquiringly, sadly, and certainly with an air of *disappointment*; 'am I now to understand that you are engaged to the Master of Aberfeldie, as these absurd Scots people call him?'

Olive bit her ruddy nether lip at this home question; but made no reply.

'What enigma is this? You either are or you are not. If *not*, why may not I——'

'I dare not listen to this style of con-

versation,' interrupted Olive, with positive annoyance; 'and you have no right to force it upon me.'

'After all that has passed?' said he, reproachfully, and rather feeling as if his hopes were melting into air.

'I do not understand you,' replied Olive, whose conscience certainly did reproach her.

'If I force this conversation—' he began in a bitter and rather upbraiding tone, then pausing; 'pardon me if I offend,' he resumed, with what seemed growing sadness, while attempting to touch her hand, yet withdrawing his own in apparent timidity. 'But am I wrong in deeming your engagement—or alleged engagement, as rumour says, made when you were a child—one in which your woman's heart and wishes have not been consulted? Tell me—for I may have to leave Dundargue soon now.'

She was in some respects but a weak girl; he a crafty and wily man of the world; and, though he knew it not in the least, he was touching her on a very tender point—yet she replied, firmly enough,

'You have no right to question me; but say, what has Allan done to you that your face should darken at the mention of his name? Is he not your friend?'

'He was.'

'And now——'

'He is no longer so.'

'Why?'

'He is my rival.'

She coloured to her temples at this blunt reply, and all it inferred.

'I loved you long before you ever cared for me,' he resumed, coolly.

'Sir—how dare you say I ever cared for you?' exclaimed Olive, her cheeks aflame now; 'let this subject cease, and be resumed no more!'

'It breaks my heart to hear you speak thus.'

'Hearts don't break now-a-days, even in such romantic places as Dundargue,' said she, with a sharp little laugh; 'and here this matter ends.'

He bowed in silence; but, fatally perhaps for Allan's interests and her own, she thought, and her vanity was flattered by the idea:

'Holcroft loves me, despite the tenor of papa's will—loves me, for myself, of course; while Allan *knows* its value to himself! Surely there is a difference in this!'

But it was precisely because Holcroft knew neither of the will nor its spirit that he took the courage to address her as he did. Had he done so, that enterprising gentleman would speedily have 'dropped out of the hunt,' and, so far as he is concerned, we should then have no story to tell.

Meanwhile he did not lose heart, and thought he had only to wait the fulness of time for the certainty of winning her, and with her, wealth—of joy or happiness he took no heed at all.

By this time, greatly to Olive's relief, Eveline and her two swains had overtaken them, and so the matter dropped, though the minds of both, from two points of view, were full of it. She would now have to endure the double annoyance of being daily in the society of a lover who had addressed her as such, and of an *intended* lover who had scarcely yet approached the subject!

And, for some reason only known to herself, she did not tell Eveline, though her bosom-friend, of what had passed between herself and Holcroft. The latter, however, still retained the golden bangle on which her name was engraved; but for a time now there was something in her

manner little to the liking of Hawke Holcroft—full as he was of dreams of her, or of her fortune rather—of the risks he ran, and the shifts to which he might be put ere he handled it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PICNIC AT DUNSINANE.

Ambling on together and urging their horses, but at an easy pace, they soon drew near the object of their destination—Macbeth's famous castle of Dunsinane—whither the portly old butler, Mr. Tappleton, had preceded them in a wagonette, freighted with a luxurious luncheon; and, leaving their cattle in charge of the grooms, they began the ascent of that peak of the Sidlaw Hills which has been immortalised by Shakespeare.

With her riding-skirt thrown over her left arm, Eveline acted as their guide, and

it may easily be supposed that she solicited the assistance of Cameron's arm, rather than that of Sir Paget Puddicombe, who had quite enough to do in assisting himself up a path which proved to him, as he said, 'rather a breather.'

It was a winding road cut in the rock, all the other sides being steep and difficult of access, and ere long, on reaching the flat and fertile summit, which commands a magnificent view of Strathmore and Blairgowrie, they found themselves within the strong rampart and deep fosse of what has once been a great military station of oval form, two hundred and ten feet long, by one hundred and thirty broad; and there they found Allan and Ruby Logan, who had preceded them, in full possession of the highest point, whence he was directing her attention to the chief features in the scenery, including, of course, Birnam Wood, fifteen miles distant, 'The Lang

Man's Grave,' a great stone, under which Macbeth is said to lie—Ruby the while clinging to his arm in the exuberance of her delight, and carrying her riding-hat in her hand, as she was quite aware that her hair alone, in its wonderful luxuriance, made her very attractive, it being an unruly mass of rich, rippling golden amber in hue, shot with a redder and brighter tint at times when the sunlight struck it.

Under the splendour of a glorious noon, while a soft breeze rippled the verdant grass, the luncheon was proceeded with; fowls were dissected, pies investigated, champagne and hock, cool from the ice-pails, uncorked; all the requisites for a merry party were there, and yet in the party itself the chief element of high spirits was wanting, unless in the instance of Ruby Logan, who began to flatter herself that she had made—or nearly so—a conquest of the Master of Aberfeldie.

Oppressed with the tenor of the conversation that had so recently passed between herself and Mr. Holcroft, Olive Raymond was unusually silent, and, for her, *distraite;* and he, remembering the somewhat decided 'snub' she had so unexpectedly given him, was somewhat silent too, but sought consolation in champagne, while listening rather abstractedly to Sir Paget Puddicombe descanting on the traditions of the neighbourhood, as, in guide-book fashion, he knew all about the predictions of the weird sisters, the defeat and death of the usurper, and was full of the probability that the great dramatist had visited Dunsinane in person.

But Holcroft only quaffed his liquor, tugged his tawny moustache from time to time, and listened with an air of boredom, mingled with a quizzical expression of mistrust in his pale grey shifty eyes.

He had seen Macbeth on the stage, of

course, and endured him more than once; but of the Thane of Cawdor he knew no more than what he had seen of him behind the footlights, and had cared to learn no more; and now it was with some genuine Cockney bewilderment, as he looked at the massive trenches around him, he began to think that 'some such fellow had existed then.'

Eveline and young Cameron, under Sir Paget's eye, were both reserved and *triste*, and no wine seemed capable of rousing animation in the lover. He had but one thought—the end of his leave was approaching, and when he left Dundargue he might never again see Eveline Graham. His heart was heavy.

When the trio were riding together, it was not that the eyes of Eveline disappointed him, or that she did not converse with him fully and earnestly; but he had detected in the manner of Sir Paget a pro-

voking air of proprietary and confidence with regard to her that keenly piqued him, and could only have been born, he rightly conjectured, of some recent confidential arrangement with Lord Aberfeldie; but the young girl herself was sweetly unconscious of it all.

His responses had been brief, and he had ventured on few remarks, aware that little would escape unnoticed; thus he had been somewhat silent, while Sir Paget's easy-going old roadster ambled between the horses of himself and Eveline, going pace for pace, Sir Paget's head at each jerking forward in turtle fashion.

The trio still remained together when seated on the grass at luncheon, for neither of the gentlemen were disposed to quit the side of Eveline, whose colour might have been noticed to heighten at a question Sir Paget asked Cameron, of whom he certainly had a certain jealousy.

'Where does your property of Stratherroch lie, Mr. Cameron?'

'In Inverness-shire.'

'Ah!—mountainous, of course—good shooting for those who care for such things—not that I do. Is the land very remunerative now?'

'To others—not to me,' said Cameron, a little bitterly. 'A fair inheritance would be mine, Sir Paget, were Stratherroch unencumbered. My father was a wild fellow in his day—as what Highland laird is not? How some acres were mortgaged in succession, how others went *in toto*, heaven only knows—I don't. The estate is at nurse now; one day it will be mine again—but not for years; and I was too long foolishly sentimental about it.'

'How?' asked Sir Paget.

'I thought I would rather that the manor-house fell to ruins than pass, even temporarily, into the possession of strangers

—of others than a Cameron; and now, by Jove! it has been for years occupied by one Jones Smithson, of Manchester.'

'Whose rental is clearing it?'

'Yes; and meantime I have little more in this world than my claymore and commission in the Black Watch,' said Cameron, with a somewhat hollow laugh and a swift, sad glance at Eveline; while Sir Paget smiled complacently as he thought of the balance at *his* bankers, and the fat, unfettered acres that lay round Slough-cum-Sloggit.

'I hope you do not find Dundargue dull, Sir Paget?' said Eveline, to change a conversation that rather oppressed her, as she was sharp enough to divine the thoughts of both men.

'Assuredly not, Miss Graham; how could it be so when I am enabled to renew my intimacy with one who can cast, as it were, bright sunshine in the most shady

place ?' he replied, with an unusual jerk of his head, a glance of eye, and accentuation of voice that annoyed her greatly, while Cameron's lip quivered under his moustache with mingled irritation and amusement.

And now at luncheon, inspired by a few bumpers of Clicquot, Sir Paget's glances at Eveline took occasionally the fashion of grotesque and languishing leers.

The wealthy baronet was older than she by a great many years, but they by no means warranted him being safe from a love, or passion rather, that might prove cruel as the grave—the passion of a middle-aged man for a very handsome young girl, whose parents were fully disposed to further his views and their own. It has been said that 'people for the life of them cannot be said to believe in the love pangs of a man over forty, or of a woman over twenty-nine,' but people may at times be wrong.

The present epoch was rather a trying one to Cameron and Eveline. As she had admitted to Allan, she knew that he loved her with a love unselfish and unspoken; and he felt intuitively that he was far from indifferent to her—knew it by the indescribable, untaught, and nameless signs by which a man learns instinctively that a woman loves him—in a first passion, a most intoxicating conviction; yet circumstances blended the happiness of Cameron with much that was alloy.

To avoid attentions or would-be tender speeches that might annoy poor Cameron, Eveline found herself compelled to talk intently to Sir Paget about local traditions and superstitions, and, thanks to her old nurse Nannie, she had—for a fashionable young lady of the present day—a curious *répertoire* of stories about wraiths and warnings, *Daione Shi* and other fairies, who were wont in pre-railway times to

haunt the corries, cairns, and rocks.

'Have you no ghosts in or about Dundargue?' asked Sir Paget. 'A grand old mansion is scarcely complete without some such spectral visitor.'

'Surely that oubliette, whatever it is, of which I have heard more than once, must contain something of the kind?' said Holcroft, in a covert, but detestable kind of sneering tone, which he could adopt when his own interests were not concerned.

'In the gallery that leads to it I have heard of something strange,' said Allan.

'Oh, do tell us—what is seen there?' exclaimed Ruby Logan.

'Nothing—but old servants have a story to the effect that if anyone remains long there,' replied Allan, laughing, 'they are certain to have a strong sense of shadowy forms — intangible presences — hovering near them, and dare not turn their heads to see what they are.'

'We have no decided ghosts, thank Heaven!' said Eveline, laughing, and all unconscious of Holcroft's manner. 'There are none even in the palaces of Holyrood or Falkland, where terrible things have been done, so why should there be in poor old Dundargue? But a spot close by where we are now lunching is the alleged scene of a curious event—a very dark tradition in our family history.'

'Why recur to a story so absurd?' said Allan.

But she was pressed to explain herself, and with a shy, sweet smile in her eyes as she glanced from time to time at Evan Cameron, and a wonderfully musical modulation of voice, she told her tale, but not quite as old nurse Nannie had told it to her.

'The deep, rocky dell that lies between this and Dundargue, a few miles distant, was ever in past times what we find it

now, covered with dense forest-trees, mingled with alders and silver birches so thickly as to exclude the rays of the sun, and it was said to be the haunt of a Urisk or mountain-goblin—a species of fiend which, Sir Walter Scott says, tradition avers to have had a figure half-man and half-goat.'

'In short, the Grecian satyr of classical antiquity,' said Allan, laughing.

'Be that as it may, the existence of this particular Urisk was never fairly proved until the days of one of our ancestors, Malise Graham of Dundargue, who fought at the battle of Ben Rinnes against the Reformers, and had in hiding in the "Priest's Hole," as it is still called, in the keep, a wandering Scottish Benedictine, known only as James of Jerusalem.

'Now, Malise Graham had an only daughter, Muriel, a girl possessed of that rare and soft beauty——'

'Which is still the inheritance of her

family,' said Sir Paget, with a most portentous jerk of his head.

'Please not to interrupt me, or I shall stop,' exclaimed Eveline, with unconcealed annoyance. 'Muriel, in her walks near Dundargue, had made—unknown to her family—the acquaintance of a handsome young stranger of winning manners and prepossessing appearance.

'In the secluded life led in those days by a maiden of rank, such an event was of deep and peculiar interest; love speedily became the sequel, and in truth the object of it seemed to have been a very loveable fellow. Thus it was, with many bitter tears, that one evening she told him that her frequent absence from home had been remarked, and that she must meet him no more in that wooded hollow, especially as it was the haunt of goblins and other evil spirits.

'On hearing this, the handsome stranger

laughed till all the dell seemed to re-echo, caressed her tenderly, and, after urging her on peril of her truth and soul to come to the trysting-place at least once again, left her in haste, as some one was seen to approach them.

'This proved to be James of Jerusalem, who is still remembered as the Black Priest of Dundargue. He wore nothing that was canonical; to have done so would have been as much as his life was worth in those days; thus he was clad in a sable Geneva cloak and doublet, with falling bands, and a calotte cap of black velvet with long lappets.

'He looked deadly pale, and was trembling in every limb, while he crossed himself again and again, and said, in a low and agitated voice,

'"Child Muriel, who is he that left you in such hot haste just now?"

'But Muriel,

"Crimson with shame, with terror mute,"

terror of her father, who was a stern and rigid man, remained silent.

'"Speak, unhappy girl!" urged the priest.

'"I know not his name," she replied, faintly.

'"Why?"

'"He conceals it from me."

'"And why?"

'"I know not; but oh, father, guide and counsel me, for I love him dearly, as he loves me."

'"You must meet him——"

'"Once again," she urged, piteously.

'"Never more, I meant to say—never more. But why say you once again?'

'"I have promised, on my soul's peril."

'"On your soul's peril indeed!" groaned the priest, in great tribulation; but, in defiance of all he could urge, Muriel, though she lived in an age of dark super-

stition, of omens and dread, inspired by her love, stole forth at the usual hour and entered the dell to meet her lover, for the last time, as it proved.

'Perhaps it was a prevision of this that made the wood seem so dark and gloomy, and even the knots and gnarled branches of the trees to look like those in the forest to Undine, fiendish faces and freakish limbs.

'Muriel knew in her heart that such meetings were wrong, unbecoming to her position, and sinful because she concealed them; but a spell seemed upon her, and she could not resist it. She took no heed of the future; she had but one thought, to be again with him.

'"And oh! why should this meeting be our last one?" she wailed in her heart, as he drew her to him, looking so handsome the while in his black doublet slashed with red, his ruff and scarlet plume.

'"My own!" said he, caressingly; "my own, I am aware that yonder dotard, fool and knave, the mass-monger, has been seeking to influence your mind against me, and to part us."

'"And here he stands prepared to do so!" exclaimed the black priest, as he suddenly appeared beside them, his eyes sparkling, but strangely with fear, rage, and triumph mingling in their expression. Muriel's lover clasped her to his breast, and wrapped his scarlet mantle round her. Then, while his eyes glared with a fire which fortunately she did not see, he exclaimed,

'"Stand back, canting liar—stand back, and begone!"

'"Child Muriel, come to me, in the name of God!" cried the priest, in sore agony; but she still clung to her lover, who, at the *name* uttered, cowered and shrank, as in the opera we see Mephistopheles

cower and shrink before the cross-hilted swords of the soldiers.

'"Muriel, Muriel, you are mine!" exclaimed her lover, attempting to lift her from the ground.

'"Take heed, child, ere it is too late," urged the priest.

'"Dare you advise?" asked the stranger, mockingly; "does not one day judge another?"

'"Yes, and the last day judges all—even such as you!" cried the benedictine; then, making a sign of the cross in the air, he exclaimed, 'In nomine Patris et Filii; et Spiritus Sancti!"

'Scarcely had he done so when, under the power of his exorcism, the mantle, ruff, and plume of the pretended knight turned to bracken leaves, his goblin chain to wild holly, and he stood forth in all his deformity, a horror to the eye, half man and half goat, with the face of a baffled

and exasperated fiend—the Urisk, or wood goblin; and, with a malignant yell, he vanished down the fast-darkening dingle!'

'And Muriel?' asked Holcroft, who had listened to all with such a smile as his face might be expected to wear.

'Was saved, of course,' said Eveline.

'And lived happy ever after?'

'Well—content at least, let us hope. She died a nun in the house of the English Benedictines at Paris—now the convent of the Val de Grace.'

'And has this legend a moral?' asked Holcroft, mockingly.

'Of course it has,' answered Allan, rather bluntly, yet with a quiet smile; 'it gave a good hint to the girls at Dundargue to beware of the attentions of unaccredited strangers.'

Holcroft's colour changed for a moment, and not unnoticed by Allan; for perhaps, reading between the lines, all this seemed

somewhat a parable to the former, who tugged at his yellow moustaches in a way he did when irritated, heedless that pomade hongroise was disastrous to straw-coloured gloves.

The angry gleam that crossed the eyes of Holcroft was also noticed by Evan Cameron, who, for some reason as yet only known to himself, could not abide him; though certainly the latter did not cross *him* by any attentions to the penniless Eveline Graham.

Her little tradition came as a pleasant interlude to nearly all, for save Sir Paget —always confident and genial—no one seemed quite at ease, as a sense of cross-purposes brooded over them.

'Tappleton,' cried Allan to the butler, 'another glass of champagne all round; and then to be off,' he added, swinging Olive adroitly into her saddle, and thus, as he thought, anticipating Holcroft,

though the latter, remembering keenly his recent 'snub,' had no intention of offering his services just then.

Allan, fearing that he had gone rather too far with Ruby Logan in attempting to pique his cousin, now resolved to leave that young lady to the care of anyone else in their homeward ride, much to her surprise and disappointment, and took his place by the side of Olive, in obedience to a half-inviting glance she gave him.

He and his sister were, of course, familiar since childhood with the ruins of Dunsinane and all their surroundings; but to two or three of the party, as they turned to depart, and saw the vast ramparts reddened by the setting sun, there came to memory the scene they had so often witnessed on the stage—Malcolm's army with the boughs of Birnam in their helmets, the 'alarms and excursions,' the fierce and protracted melo-dramatic combat, the

downfall of Macbeth beneath the sword of Macduff, and the cries of 'Hail, King of Scotland—King of Scotland, hail!'

CHAPTER X.

THE GOLDEN BANGLE.

A WRITER says 'there is the beauty of youth, and surely there is the beauty of love, too,' and the latter certainly shone in the soft eyes of Eveline Graham as she caracoled her horse in the homeward ride by the side of young Cameron, and her eyes, which were ever the mystery of that face, had now their sweetest smiles for him. She saw how his face was lighted up, and was aware how his voice softened when he addressed her as it softened to no other woman; and yet, withal, though no word of love had passed between these two, right well did they know the secret

of each other's hearts; but poverty fettered his tongue, and her parents' ambition and known wishes nearly repressed all hope in the heart of Eveline.

With all her regard for her father she had a fear of him, and still more so of her mother. All their prejudices were in favour of wealth; but Evan Cameron appeared to her altogether so dear and irresistible that she, poor girl, could not imagine anyone being proof against him, and with this conviction, and the knowledge that Allan loved him, she permitted herself occasionally to live in a kind of fool's paradise, wherein Sir Paget Puddicombe had no part.

When her mother was not present, she played to Evan Cameron, and sang his favourite songs; she showed him her drawings for hints and suggestions, discussed her favourite books, and let him hang over her chair; and at such times,

though nothing of love was said, there was a subtle tenderness in Cameron's eye and voice that made her impulsive heart quicken, as no man's eye or voice had ever done before, and young though she was, Eveline had heard more than one declaration of love.

And now for a time he had the joy of having her all to himself, as they contrived to distance the rest of their party.

But what availed it? Evan knew that, if once he passed beyond what appeared to be the merest friendship, his visit to Dundargue might come to a speedy end, and its hospitality could never be extended to him again.

To Evan, Eveline Graham proved, if we may say so, a kind of revelation after the rough life he had led of late years in India—something from another world, as it were—and thus much of adoration mingled with his love for her. If dying could

have served Eveline, there and then would Evan Cameron have died for her!

Whether such enthusiastic passion might last it was impossible to say, but time may show.

We have referred to the quiet confidence of Sir Paget Puddicombe—a confidence borne of his consciousness of wealth and assured position. However, he was sharp enough to see to some extent how Cameron was attracted by Eveline, and to feel how the latter preferred the young subaltern's society to his own; but in a very short time he knew that the 'detrimental,' as Lady Abergeldie called him, would be again with his regiment, the Black Watch, perhaps under orders for foreign service; then he would have the course all to himself, and doubted not, as Holcroft would have said, 'to win in a canter.'

Cameron thought the proverb right about there being no fool like an old one;

but then, every old fool had not Sir Paget's bank-book, and the preference and influence of parents to back up his folly. But with a handsome figure, and his V.C., how much more was Cameron like the object of a young girl's eye than Sir Paget could ever be!

'It was in the Kurram Pass, in Afghanistan, that you gained the Victoria Cross, Mr. Cameron?' said Eveline, breaking a pause in the conversation, and shortening her reins, while he checked the pace of his horse, and replied, with a pleased smile,

'Yes; but how do you know that, Miss Graham — from your brother, the Master?'

'No.'

'I have never spoken of it.'

'I read it in the Army List,' replied Eveline, candidly, and to hear her say so made the bronze cross of more value to

him than the Garter would have been.

She had read it, and committed the episode to heart too—how 'the Queen had been graciously pleased to signify her intention of conferring the decoration of the Victoria Cross' on Lieutenant Evan Cameron, of the —th Foot, and now of the Black Watch, for a daring act of bravery on a date given, when the retreating forces were attacked by Afghans in great strength, the latter having pushed forward upon the position at daybreak, and Lieutenant Cameron, accompanied by only five soldiers, captured a nine-pounder gun, shooting down or bayonetting all the gunners, and thus preventing the destructive use of the piece, which he brought off with the loss of one man, but in the conflict received three severe tulwar wounds.

Cameron was an enthusiast in his profession, and with outwardly the air of a well-bred man of the world, and thoroughly

so that of a young Line officer, he had in his nature a deep sentiment of nationality, of clanship, and Highland romance, with an intense pride in his regiment. He had entertained Eveline often with sketches, anecdotes, and traditions of the Black Watch, but of himself and his V.C., of course, he never spoke.

'What a proud moment it must have been for you, when you knew that you had won the cross!' said the girl, with a flush on her soft cheek.

Stirred in his soul by the interest she took in him, the great secret of his heart was trembling on his lips, but he repressed it, and a shadow came into his face and a wistfulness into his eyes.

'Prouder would I have been, Miss Graham,' said he, 'if—if—I——'

'What?'

'I had then been known even by name to *you*,' he replied, in a low voice, and

with a manner there was no mistaking.

Nothing more was said then; yet they both felt, while eye met eye, that their first words of love had been spoken.

More might, perhaps, have passed, as the subject could easily have been enlarged on; but just then they were abruptly joined by Allan, who came up at a trot and reined in his horse sharply by their side, with a dark expression on his face, which Eveline thought augured ill for his success with Olive, whom he had suddenly left in the care of Mr. Hawke Holcroft.

After quitting the ruins, as Allan rode on by his cousin's side, his memory had gone back to the days when she was a girl of some twelve years or so—a bright-eyed hoyden, who could fish, even take a shot from his gun, climb trees, eat apples right off the branch, play marbles with him, grasp a trout darting in the burn under the long yellow broom or purple brambles,

and was his companion in many a ramble and out-door frolic; and now inspired by that memory, the scenery and beauty of the evening, he felt himself disposed to treat with considerable tenderness the lovely girl he hoped to make yet his own.

On the other hand, Olive cared little to please him, and for a time she almost repelled, and yet by doing so she greatly lured and attracted him.

The friendship of Allan and Olive was a source of some perplexity, if not amusement, to Eveline Graham, but of irritation to her mother, to whom they never seemed to act as lovers at all, unless in 'the Scots fashion' of pouting and quarrelling.

To the eyes of all interested in the matter, it did not seem that she cared for him in the least. She never altered a plan or hastened her pace to meet him, or go where he might chance to be—in the library, on the terrace smoking, or in any of the

quaint corridors that traversed the old house. She never adopted a dress, a ribbon, or ornament to please his eye, though she sometimes did, coquettishly, he thought, to flatter Hawke Holcroft; and even now, as they were slowly traversing the dark, woody dell of the legend —the *Coire-nan-Uriskin*—she was humming, half in warning, half in waggery, Tennyson's song:

> 'She can both false and friendly be,
> Beware! beware!
> Trust her not, she is fooling thee!'

And yet, as she glanced at her soldierly cousin from time to time under her long, dark lashes, she thought that, though he looked stately in the kilt, he seldom looked better than now when in riding costume, with the smartest of light grey cover coats.

The girl's mind vibrated curiously between her over-sensitive pride, her wishes, her doubts, and half convictions.

If pique at her position in the family with Allan had made her accept, with a certain degree of equanimity, the attentions of Holcroft, she now began to feel a pleasure that she had not more fully encouraged them.

At such moments as the present Allan felt that this fair girl, who had ever been his friend—cherished as a sister—this sweet cousin with the violet eyes and rich brown hair—was dear to him with a tenderness to which he could scarcely give a name, unless it were purest love; and she might have read it in his eyes, intense and strong, but for that spirit of wilfulness which led her to temporise—was it to tyrannise?—or play with it and him.

But may a girl really love a man till she is certain of being loved in return? For Allan, baffled by her manner, had said nothing very pointed as yet, as if he based all their future on her father's will; and

times there were when in pique he dropped his way of treating her half playfully, half deferentially, and became absolutely cold.

In fact, the thoughts of Olive, apart from her jealous pride, were somewhat difficult to analyse; but, as yet, she deemed that she could only regard him with a kind of sisterly attention; while he, when not irritated by the presence of Holcroft, would say to Eveline,

'When we are alone, and can slip back into our old memories, I shall soon teach her to love me.'

'But meantime,' replied his sister, 'you are the most tiresome couple in the world.'

'I wish Mr. Holcroft or some one else would join us,' said Olive, looking round in her saddle.

'Why, it is always Mr. Holcroft!' exclaimed Allan.

'You are so provokingly silent. For

more than a mile you have not once spoken to me. It is stupid to be so *triste!* Surely there is some one else whose society you prefer, or with whom you would be more lively?'

'Olive!' said he, on hearing this blunt and pointed remark—both curiously so for her. 'You are surely not jealous of anyone?' he added.

'Jealous!' echoed the girl, with a strange but affected kind of lazy scorn; 'why should I be so, and of *whom?*'

'Well may you ask, of whom could you be so?' replied Allan, pointedly—so much so that she coloured; 'though I, of course, matter little to you.'

'Allan, you are very wrong to say so,' said the girl, softly.

'Then I am not quite indifferent to you?' urged Allan, impulsively now; 'you do care for me a little?'

'Certainly—a good deal, if it is any

satisfaction to you; but there—don't touch my bridle hand, or you will make my horse shy. How can you be so tiresome!'

Allan sighed, and yet he regarded her, in her loveliness and *insouciance*, with an expression just then of mingled amusement, annoyance, and regard in his dark hazel eyes.

With all the love that had been growing in his heart for Olive, he had been in no hurry to urge his suit, for, though impetuous by nature, he could be reserved and cautious enough at times; but now his heart flew to his head, and he said, bluntly,

'Dearest Olive, will you promise to love me—to marry me?'

'Why require any promise about the matter?' she replied, as all her wilfulness returned; 'has not my father promised for me—bequeathed me to you like a bale of goods, or condemned me to poverty!' she

added, with a bitter laugh on her lips that curled with anger. 'I wonder that he did not order that I was to be locked up and fed on bread and water till I gave my consent to marry you, or that I was to be dropped into that oubliette which exists somewhere in Dundargue.'

'Cousin Olive,' said he, reproachfully, 'why this pride and doubt of my purpose? You are as cruel as you are beautiful.'

'This is worse than anything you have ever said to me,' she cried, with angry laughter still.

'Worse?'

'Yes, an attempt at gross straightforward compliment, as if I was a girl at a railway buffet.'

'Don't you like to be complimented?'

'By some people—yes,' was the petulant reply.

'All the girls I have ever known have liked pretty, flattering speeches.'

'But I am different, I hope, from most of the girls you have known.'

'By Jove you are!' replied the Master, twisting his moustache till he made himself wince; 'but will I never be more to you than I am now?'

'Never more than my cousin—what would you desire to be? But here comes Mr. Holcroft, to whom I certainly made no sign,' she added, with some annoyance, as she thought of what had so lately passed between them; and then, so variable was her emotion, that she laughed as she thought—'Two proposals in one day, and both made in the saddle too—how droll!'

Allan misinterpreted her silent laugh as a welcome to Holcroft, and shrank from his own angry fears—they were not convictions yet—lest he should adopt that meanest passion of the whole category—jealousy without a just cause—jealousy of one inferior to him in social position,

and certainly in personal attractions.

When reduced to act cavalier to Miss Ruby Logan, who certainly did not want him, Hawke Holcroft had looked darkly after the cousins as they rode off together, and thought that nothing short of death would prevent him from accomplishing the object he had now in view ere he left Dundargue.

From something in the manner of the cousins, he—a close observer—augured that Allan had not made his 'innings' with the heiress, yet he cantered up to Allan's side, and said, smilingly to Olive,

'May I smoke, Miss Raymond? The road is quite lonely, and if not disagreeable to you——'

'Certainly,' said she, curtly.

'And I shall join you,' added Allan. 'Can you oblige me with a light, Holcroft?'

Cigars were selected, and Holcroft

handed his silver matchbox to Allan, who, with a leap of his heart, though without changing colour or a muscle of his dark and sunburned face, saw on his rival's wrist his own gift sent from Delhi, the gold bangle, which Olive had, perhaps, for the time forgotten, and on which was her own name in raised Roman letters.

He had seen Holcroft in rather close proximity to her during the most of the day, and if piqued thereat, more than ever was he piqued and startled now, and abruptly wheeling round his horse, he muttered some excuse and joined his sister and his friend Cameron, while the words of the song came ominously back to memory—

'Trust her not, she is fooling *thee*.'

The bangle! He blushed to think of it, and shrank as yet from speaking of it, even to Eveline, for he was altogether unaware of under what circumstances

Holcroft came to possess it, or the effort Olive had made to procure its return without success, but imagination and jealousy now did much to fill his heart with secret fury.

Would the future hold love or hatred for these two cousins? It seemed just then difficult to say.

Like Eveline, he thought the gift of the photo a trifle when compared with this, yet the photo was eventually to prove the most serious and troublesome gift of the two.

Wounded self-esteem, disquiet, and intense mortification reigned supreme in the mind of the somewhat proud young Master of Aberfeldie; but he felt himself necessitated to dissemble. Hawke Holcroft was his father's guest, the son of his father's oldest and most valued friend; and while at Dundargue it would be necessary to treat him with courtesy, though Allan

never doubted that he was a 'leg,' and resolved that his courtesy would be blended with watchfulness, if—bitter thought—Olive was now worth watching over!

Unprepared for such a crisis or catastrophe as the discovery of the bangle, and ignorant that Allan had made it, when a carpet-dance took place that evening at Dundargue, though Olive was arrayed in one of her most becoming toilettes for him, and him alone, he never even addressed her or looked near her; and, black though his brow, he entirely occupied himself with Ruby Logan; and, provoked by this, Olive again endured the attention of Holcroft, and thought to play—or affect to play—with them *both*.

In this, however, the little scheme was doomed to be disappointed by the events of the following day.

'I shall quit Dundargue for London, or give up my leave and go back to the regi-

ment, and never look upon her fair, false face again till I have schooled myself into merely regarding her with a brotherly—well, say cousinly—eye !' thought Allan, with great bitterness of spirit.

But how about that absurd will and the settlement of the money ?

CHAPTER XI.

EVELINE'S SUITOR.

'VERILY,' says a writer, 'we miss our opportunities, and live our lives as if they were all to come twice over; not as if each passing sunset brought us nearer that day when the pulse must cease to beat, and the heart with all its emotions must be stilled for ever.'

Olive was now experiencing the truth of this to a certain extent.

She *had* been—in spite of herself—touched by Allan's earnestness, and on retiring to her room her first act was to

have his neglected gift—the little silver idol—the bequest of the grateful subadar—duly installed on a pretty Swiss bracket, and next morning she determined to discover why his manner, after their return from Dunsinane, had been so marked and disagreeable to her, even if she should take the initiative, and have to recur to the conversation which ended so abruptly on the preceding evening.

She entered the breakfast-room full of the subject, and dressed—so far as lace and blue ribbons went—in a most attractive and coquettish morning costume; but Allan was not there—he was at the stables, no doubt, or at the kennel. How tiresome men were, she thought.

'Good morning, Olive darling! how charming you look—I must positively give you a kiss!' exclaimed the not usually effusive Lady Aberfeldie, touching the girl's cheek with her lips.

The last to appear at the breakfast-table was her husband, who entered with a note in his hand, and an expression of surprise on his face.

'Here is a strange thing, Eveline,' said he to Lady Aberfeldie. 'Tappleton has just brought me this note from Allan——'

'From Allan!' exclaimed one or two voices.

'Stating that he would leave by dawn this morning to take the train for the south, and might be absent some time, and this without further explanation.'

'How odd—how unlike him!' exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie. 'Do you know of any business engagement or invitation he had?'

'No—I know of nothing.'

'Or you, Olive—or you, Mr. Cameron?'

All professed ignorance, and the matter

was canvassed by the family circle in vain.

'It will be explained, of course. Allan never acts without reason,' said his father, addressing himself to the morning meal.

'Allan gone—how odd—how unaccountable!' was the thought of Olive, whose heart rather reproached her; and now, for a little time, she missed the handsome cousin whom she had so teased, worried, and mortified; and she began to dread that he had resigned his leave of absence, and gone abruptly to rejoin his regiment.

'Olive,' said Lady Aberfeldie, 'do go on with your breakfast.'

'Oh, auntie, I have finished.'

'Finished!—child, you have taken nothing: Tappleton will get you a little grouse-pie.'

'Oh, no—thanks,' replied Olive, and, ris-

ing from the table, she quitted the room. The eyes of her aunt and Holcroft followed her, as each had thoughts of their own.

The love the latter professed for her was destitute of jealousy, but was not without fear; and his face just then would have been a picture had anyone cared to study it.

There might have been read satisfaction that by Allan's unexpected departure he had the field all to himself; annoyance, for the Dundargue despatch-box often brought him, and on this morning had done so, epistles in blue envelopes, which he cared not to receive; greed, as he thought of the prize that might yet be his; and hot impatience to find it in his grasp; and thus, while affecting to listen to Lord Aberfeldie, who was describing to him and Sir Paget a cover they were to shoot over that day, his mind was revolving how he might succeed in entrapping Olive Raymond into

some kind of Scotch marriage (whatever that was) in fun, or jest, and then declare it was a true and solemn ceremony. He thought he had heard of such things being tried and done, but was not quite certain.

However, he took fresh courage now that he would have her all to himself, and thought, with Bulwer, that 'thrones and bread man wins by the aid of others. Fame and woman's heart he can only gain through himself.'

Not that he cared much for fame or woman's heart either; but he could mightily appreciate her fortune.

Whatever was the secret thought of Olive about the sudden and unexpected departure of Allan, she felt some renewal of her pique, but of a different kind, when told by Eveline of the magnificent suite of Maltese ornaments he had brought home.

'For whom?' she asked.

'You, of course.'

'Then he has never offered them for my acceptance.'

'Think of your manner to him, Olive.'

'They are for Ruby Logan more likely. He has met Ruby *before*, we all know.'

'I should not be surprised if they become a gift to Ruby now,' replied Eveline, who was quietly provoked by Olive's treatment of her brother; 'though, when he got these jewels at Malta, I question if he knew of that yellow-haired damsel's existence.'

And now, greatly to the vexation of Eveline, and the amusement perhaps of Olive, the latter's bangle remained on the wrist of the enterprising Mr. Holcroft, though none of them knew the mischief that the discovery of it had wrought in the mind of Allan Graham; but in the latter's absence poor little Eveline was doomed to have—unsupported by his presence and advice—some heavy trouble of her own.

Lord and Lady Aberfeldie were in consultation in the latter's boudoir, a little, old-fashioned room of octagonal shape, the panelled walls of which were hung with rich silk—a sanctum long sacred to the Chatelaines of Dundargue, and the whole appurtenances of which had that combined air of ease, repose, and grandeur peculiar to the furniture of an ancient and long-descended race.

Kelpie—a currish-looking terrier, but her ladyship's pet—had got his morning repast of cream and macaroons from her own white hands, and, this important duty over, she and her husband began to converse on family matters.

Lady Aberfeldie amid these, indulged in some angry surmises as to how long they were 'to have the society of Mr. Holcroft.'

'I cannot say that I care much personally for Hawke Holcroft,' replied her hus-

band; 'but his father, as you know, saved my life at Alma, and won therefore the V.C. I have told you, Eveline, I think, that when Colin Campbell's Highland brigade advanced in *echelon* of regiments along the Kourgané Hill, the Black Watch, of course, led the way, and, just about the time the Russian Kazan column broke, no particular sound had followed our firing but the yells of their wounded ringing through the smoke. With the next volley we heard a rattling sound, as our bullets fell like hail upon the tin-kettles they carried outside their knapsacks, as all the great grey-coated blocks of infantry were *right about face* now, in full retreat. It was just then, as our calvary and guns swept after them in pursuit, that I fell wounded, and would have been bayoneted on the spot by four Russians, who lay among some caper bushes shamming death, had not old Major Holcroft cut them down like ninepins, and protected me till

some of our fellows returned. I cannot forget all that, you know.'

Lady Aberfeldie, who had heard all this fifty times at least before, sighed with impatience, and said,

'His son certainly appears to have some attraction for Olive; and what would you think if Allan, repelled by her, was actually to fall in love with Ruby Logan and her amber locks? What a complication that might be.'

'Don't suggest such a thing for a moment. I hope he will prove himself every way worthy of one who has so long occupied, like Eveline, the place of a daughter in our hearts.'

'Talking of Eveline, it is high time she was informed of Sir Paget's views and wishes; and while on the subject may I ask,' she added, with some asperity of tone, 'how long Mr. Cameron is to be here?'

'A week yet, and then he must report himself at head-quarters.'

'A whole week?' muttered lady Aberfeldie, who was far from inhospitable when she approved of the objects to whom she thought hospitality should be extended.

'I do like Stratherroch. He is like his father, old Angus of the Cameron Highlanders, yet not so lively; for Angus was the king of good fellows, and used to keep the mess-table in a roar.'

'Yet I would his son were with the regiment again, or anywhere else but here.'

'I think he admires Eveline.'

'I am certain of it, and the sooner their intimacy terminates the better. Eveline and Strath—good heavens!' exclaimed Lady Aberfeldie, with her white jewelled hands uplifted, 'never again must their names be mingled, even in our family circle, especially under pending circumstances.'

'They do seem intimate,' said the peer, moodily; 'but have not at least progressed so far as the use of Christian names.'

'That would be intolerable;' and, ringing the bell, Lady Aberfeldie desired a servant to summon her daughter, who appeared in a very coquettish and becoming lawn-tennis costume, for a game on the lawn, where the courts were already set and some friends awaited.

She entered with a bright smile, which soon died away, for she read an expression in the faces of her parents, especially that of her mother, which seemed to her sensitive heart prophetic of evil.

If it be true, as Madame be Stael asserts, that 'love occupies the whole life of a woman,' it need not be a matter of surprise that the sex can discover each other's love secrets with ease; thus, though Lady Aberfeldie fully suspected what filled the heart of her daughter—so closely had she

watched her—she was somewhat pitiless now.

With all her queenly manner and soft grace, her unexceptional toilettes and sauvity of manner, Lady Aberfeldie had a will of iron, yea, of adamant in some things, and her daughter's marriage with Sir Paget was one of them.

She was told plainly and bluntly that he had proposed for her hand; had asked permission to address her on the subject; had offered magnificent—yea, princely settlements; and it was expected the marriage would take place, when the family returned to London, next season.

The long dreaded cloud had burst upon her at last!

She grew white as a lily on hearing this sentence, clung to a console table for support, and then burst into a torrent of tears, while her father drew her tenderly towards him.

'Be calm, child,' said he, 'we shall give you plenty of time to think about it; marriage is a serious thing at all times.'

Eveline thought it was doubly serious with such a bridegroom, but could only sob, while her mother eyed her gloomily, as she thought this excessive grief and repugnance augured worse for her scheme than indignation or defiance would have done; but poor Eveline was all softness and gentleness.

'What folly is this?' she asked.

'I am your only daughter, mamma,' urged Eveline.

'Hence it is your first duty to your family, to yourself, and the world to make an early, eligible, and wealthy marriage. Every season brings many such to pass in our own circle.'

'Are we so poor, mamma?'

'We are not rich, and know not what may happen.'

Did Lady Aberfeldie speak prophetically? If so, it was an utterance made unawares.

'Eveline darling,' said her father, 'you were content enough with the attentions of Sir Paget, and to accept even his presents in London, a season or two ago.'

'I was but a girl then fresh from school, and—and joined other girls in laughing at my having an old lover. I—I knew no better,' she continued, sobbing.

'And had not met Cameron of Strath-erroch!' said her mother through her set teeth, and quite forgetting the *rôle* she had so recently suggested.

'No,' thought Eveline, 'and had not learned to love him.' She shivered as if she had been struck when her mother spoke, and then said, with all the firmness she could assume,

'You must mistake us in some way, mamma. Mr. Cameron has never addressed

a word to me that he might not have addressed to yourself.'

'I am glad of it—then I shall taunt you with his name no more,' said her mother, kissing her forehead. 'People generally, but young ladies especially, should never indulge in strong emotions.'

'Perhaps, mamma; but why?'

'They age the face so much by lining it.'

Eveline covered with her handkerchief her whole sweet face, which was quivering with emotion now. She felt that the romance of her young girl's life was quite passing from her, and that, even if she escaped a marriage with Sir Paget, she must think of Evan Cameron and his silent love no more!

'Think of Sir Paget's princely settlements,' said Lord Aberfeldie. 'But how difficult it is,' he added, as if to himself, 'to imbue a woman—a pretty girl more than all—with any idea of the seriousness of

pounds, shillings, and pence! To her they are as the sands upon the seashore, unless she has known want.'

'Do reflect on all this, Eveline,' urged her mother.

'I cannot; and why should I do so?'

'Because most of the great evils of life might be avoided if we would only take time to reflect.'

'In a matter like this, mamma,' said Eveline, taking courage from her desperation, and hoping by temporising to gain, at least, time, 'reflection might lead to madness. Can wealth or princely settlements make up for that disparity of years which will excite ridicule in all the girls who know me, and cover me with contempt as a mean, sordid, and covetous creature in marrying a man I do not and can never love, and who cannot really care for me, whatever he may think or say? So, so, I am to be taken to market, as it were, and

sold to the best advantage. That is the plain English of it!'

'Eveline, how can you adopt a tone so little like you?' said her mother, reproachfully. 'Sir Paget will be sure to address you on this subject, as he has your papa's permission, and, when he does so, be sure that you comport yourself as becomes *my* daughter,' she added, rather haughtily, and rather ignoring her husband in the matter. 'But go; I hear Olive and Miss Logan calling for you.'

Eveline hurried away, bathed her eyes, and then, hat in hand, descended from the terrace to the sunny lawn, where Olive, Ruby, and other girls were flitting about, radiant with smiles and in gaily-coloured costumes, with saucy and bewitching hats, talking and laughing merrily; but the girl felt as one in a dream, a nightmare. A dark cloud seemed to envelop her, amid which she heard the voices of her friends,

and it may be imagined with what emotions in her breast she saw in the tennis-court opposite her, Cameron, looking so handsome in a kind of athlete's flannel dress, and the rotund figure of Sir Paget in a tight morning coat, out of the neck of which his round, shining head was jerked ever and anon in the turtle fashion we have described.

Never while she lived, Eveline thought, should she forget the horror she had of that game of lawn-tennis; the part she had to act in it under a glorious sunshine, and the desire she had for the seclusion of her own room, for by contrast with the chaos in her own heart the whole bright scene became a species of grim phantasmagoria.

Her heart seemed full of tears; her naturally buoyant and happy spirit was crushed. She dared hardly trust herself to address even Cameron, who saw, with a lover's instinct, that something, he knew

not what (unless with reference to Sir Paget), had gone decidedly wrong.

We have already adverted to the strong passion an elderly swain like Sir Paget may conceive for a young girl; and, encouraged by her parents' permission, he was now giving full swing to it, as he watched her slender, lithe, and willowy figure in the various postures incident to the game, which tested *his* powers of action severely, and during a pause in it he approached her with a smile rippling on his rubicund old face, and displaying a set of teeth that were first-rate as to cost and quality.

'My dear Miss Graham,' he said, with a most insinuating jerk of his head, 'why do you avoid me?'

'I am not aware that I avoid you; I hope I don't do so,' replied Eveline, colouring with annoyance, and at the conviction that she certainly had done so. Then, as

a kind of hunted feeling came over her, she added; 'but I do not think, Sir Paget, that I am bound to account to you for all I do.'

'Of course not,' said he, with a bow, and Eveline coloured more deeply at the ungraciousness of her own speech; 'of course not, my dear young lady—*as yet*,' he added, under his breath.

At last she pleaded illness, fatigue, and headache, threw down her hat, and fairly fled to her own room.

CHAPTER XII.

A REVELATION TO HOLCROFT.

The sudden, unexpected, and unexplained departure of Allan Graham from Dundargue (a reason for which will be given in due time), if it puzzled his family, still more puzzled and piqued Olive, especially after what passed between them on their homeward ride. But then, says Lefanu, —'Women are so enigmatical; some in everything—all in matters of the heart.'

The monetary matters of Mr. Hawke Holcroft were approaching a species of

crisis now, and he was daily getting orange-coloured missives and messages 'wired' in mysterious terms from jockeys, bookmakers, and other horsey folks that added to his tribulation, for things seemed to be going wrong with him, and he felt that now or never must he attempt to secure the heiress, who, he thought, was only waiting to be carried off.

Even loo and écarté in the evening with such pigeon-like players as Sir Paget were beginning to fail as resources.

'Odd fellow in his way,' remarked the baronet to Cameron. 'A trifle too lucky at cards for my taste.'

'Or mine,' said Cameron, grimly.

'Turns up the king too often after the early hours of the morning.'

Yet when night came again and the small hours of the morning, the somewhat simple M.P. for Slough-cum-Sloggit was again a heavy loser to Holcroft.

'He has some secret about him,' said the former.

'Most men have some secret which they generally keep to themselves,' replied Cameron.

'Secrets certainly, which they seldom tell to their wives or sweethearts,' said the baronet, laughing.

We have said that Olive had a secret thought that might prove somewhat fatal to Allan's success with her, a mistaken idea that Holcroft loved her—loved her for herself—and despite the tenor of her father's will; while Allan might love her because he knew the value of its tenor to himself.

And, now that the latter was so unaccountably absent, Holcroft was full of confidence, and, the ice having once been broken, thought it would be easy to go back to where he had left off on the ride home from Dunsinane.

In his own selfish way he loved her; but then she was beautiful. Loved her! 'Oh, poverty of language, that we must so often use the word love!' exclaims a writer.

It was some days before his inevitable departure from Dundargue (and not an hour too soon for that), when he and Olive were somewhat earlier, and before anyone else, in the breakfast-room, and the notes of Ronald Gair's pipes, playing his morning reveille, 'The Black Watch,' a slow and wailing air, were dying away on the terrace outside.

Holcroft's face looked worn and haggard—more freckled, and the eyes more than usually shifty in their expression. He had received some letters and telegrams the evening before that upset him so much that he failed even to win at loo or écarté, and the live-long night he had been heard by Cameron pacing to and fro, as if unable to rest.

Olive was struck by his pallid appearance.

They exchanged 'Good-mornings,' and then a few minutes' silence ensued.

'We may have rain soon,' was the not very original remark of Holcroft.

'The sky looks very like it. Rain always comes when the mist is where we see it now, on yonder low spur of the Sidlaw Hills,' replied Olive.

She was kneeling on a bearskin, beside the great staghounds, Shiuloch and Bran, with her little white hands outspread before the fire for warmth; and a charming picture she made, in her morning costume, fresh and lovely as a fairy, with the dogs in the foreground, and the great carved stone arch of the baronial chimney-piece for a frame.

Hawke Holcroft turned from the window and came to her side, though curiously enough the hazel eyes of the hounds

glistened, and they showed their teeth at him, suggestive of kicks secretly administered.

'We are down earlier than usual this morning,' said she.

'All the better.'

'Why?'

'I want so particularly to talk to you,' said he, with all the softness he could assume.

'And I with you,' said Olive, with a frankness that was a curious mistake. 'You leave us soon, I believe?'

'Yes.'

'For London?'

'For London,' he replied, mechanically, as it were.

'I thought you came to stay out the grouse-shooting?'

'Till the tenth of December! I have not been asked,' he replied, gnawing his yellow moustache; and then, after a pause,

added, 'would *you* wish that I stayed?'

'Certainly, if you are enjoying yourself,' was the girl's frank but—after what he had urged some time ago—rather rash response.

His eyes sparkled—he drew nearer.

'Miss Raymond—Olive!' he exclaimed, but paused, as, at that moment, Lady Aberfeldie swept into the room; 'on the terrace—the terrace after breakfast,' he whispered, hurriedly, and then turned to receive his hostess's morning greeting, which was so frigid that he feared she had overheard him call her niece by her Christian name.

Holcroft was rather abstracted at breakfast; thus Ruby Logan, who had been watching him, said,

'I would not, if I were you, put more sugar on the devilled turkey; it won't improve it.'

'Forgot it was not salt; thanks, Miss Logan,' stammered Holcroft.

Now, whether the charming Olive was inspired by coquetry, curiosity, caprice, or a strange desire to play with fire, we know not; but when breakfast was over she laid down a novel she had been reading, or affecting to read, at intervals during the meal, and, assuming her garden hat, with all the laces and ribbons of her bright morning dress fluttering about her, while everyone else at table was deep in his or her letters and papers, went forth upon—the terrace!

Now Mr. Hawke Holcroft never read novels or anything else unless for a purpose. He glanced at the page which Olive had left open (the work was 'Miss Forrester') and the passage struck him as most *apropos* to himself:

'I never pretended to goodness. I have certain views for myself. I never pretended to fooling. I am clever. What stands between me and my ambition I will

remove; of whatever can administer to it I will avail myself. Beyond this, it seems to me, I am as good as other people.'

'Hawke, my boy, yourself to a hair!' thought he, as he quietly sought the terrace, not by the French window, as Olive had done, but by going through a corridor and the entrance hall.

As coolly as if she had no prevision of what he was sure to urge, Olive, who wore a waggish yet shy expression under her garden hat, and who kept her hands deep in the pockets of her morning dress, said,

'What have you to say to me here that you could not have said in the vicinity of the tea-urn?'

'All that I have to say may be said in three words.'

'Three! say it then.'

'I love you; a confession that has hovered on my timid lips many a time.'

'I cannot listen to this, and I wish to

have back my bangle. If Allan were to see it—good heavens!'

'I have said that it shall be buried with me. Do give me some hope.'

'Of what; permission to retain the bangle?'

'No; that you may one day love me.'

'I cannot.'

'Say rather that you will not.'

Barring, in an angle of the terrace, her attempts to leave him, he continued, in an earnestness that was born of monetary pressure and desperate hope, to plead his passion.

'I am greatly honoured,' replied the girl, growing cold as he waxed warm, and glancing nervously at the windows of the mansion; 'but I am very sorry——'

'That you don't love me.'

'Yes.'

'But you may in time. Oh, how I could teach you to do so! Let me wait and strive, Olive. You deem me wild, perhaps

—horsey, and all that sort of thing; but do you think a man never changes, never grows better, under a woman's softening influence? Are you entirely to let this family compact, whatever it may be, Olive —pardon me, Miss Raymond,' he added, as he saw how her face clouded by the reference to her position—'are you intending to let it stand between you and all other chances of marriage?'

'You have no right to question me thus, or to assume this interest in my affairs, Mr. Holcroft.'

'Pardon me, but I have a love for you that will last while life does.'

He did not add that it was the love of—her money.

'If there is only the Master, your cousin, between us, that is no barrier, as I know you don't love him.'

'Then you know more of me than I do of myself,' said Olive, provoked by his blunt

brusquerie of manner, and failing to be flattered by his pertinacity just then.

'Perhaps you deem me an heiress?' said Olive, as a new light suddenly broke upon her.

'My dear Miss Raymond,' stammered Holcroft, colouring with surprise at the abruptness of her question. 'I never thought upon the subject; I only knew that—that—I am not just now a man of fortune; my place in Essex——' he paused, thinking the less he said about *it* the better. 'But who thinks of pelf when the heart is full of passion!' he added, magnanimously. 'But tell me now,' said he, in his most suave tone, 'do you care for anyone else more than for me?'

'I don't care for you at all—at least in the way you mean,' she replied, defiantly.

He ground his teeth, even while he smiled, and thought,

'I must have patience before I tempt my fate again!'

Hawke Holcroft had made it so much a habit during his sojourn at Dundargue to be in close attendance upon Olive—especially when they were alone together—that his lovemaking took her less by surprise. In a spirit of pique she had permitted him to dangle, and to play—if we may use the term—at admiration for herself; but, now that he had become serious a second time, she became alarmed.

The remark which had escaped her had excited some surprise in the mind of Holcroft, as it interested him deeply; thus he said, in a low soft voice,

'You referred to your not being an heiress, Miss Raymond, as if *that* could possibly make any difference with one who loves you as—as——'

'There, there, that will do!' interrupted the impetuous Olive; 'I am *not* an heiress,

in one sense, but very much of a beggar, if you knew all,' she added, in a voice that faltered.

He regarded her with some bewilderment, as well he might, and said,

'My dear Miss Raymond, what am I to understand by this paradox?'

'Understand that I must marry my cousin Allan, or forfeit papa's fortune—it goes to him if I refuse, or to charities.'

Her distinctness and vehemence carried conviction with her words. Holcroft was confounded; but, being a practised dissembler, he only smiled, and said,

'A most remarkable arrangement, and a tyrannical one for you. But suppose the Master had died in his boyhood—or were to die now?'

'The will would be worthless in effect, of course, I suppose,' replied Olive, whose cheeks now burned scarlet, for—always a creature of hot impulse—she now thought,

'*why* should I have permitted myself to speak to *him*, one, almost a stranger, or to any man, of papa's will? What must he think of me! Oh, what will Aunt Aberfeldie say?'

For half a minute Holcroft was silent. He was thinking, 'this must be all bosh!—a cock and a bull, or a madman's will; she doesn't know what she is talking about—no woman or girl ever knows business. Well—I've a pull on her anyway; a viscount's niece isn't in a fellow's power every day, as she will find herself in mine.'

What he referred to we shall show ere long.

While Olive was still crimson with reflections on her own imprudence, Holcroft took possession of her passive hands, and said, in a partly assumed voice of agitation,

'You told me, Miss Raymond—let me say Olive—a minute or two ago that you did not care for me. I shall not take that as your final answer; and ere I leave

Dundargue, when I again venture to speak to you on the subject nearest my heart, your reply——'

'Will too probably be the same,' replied Olive, wrenching away her hands, as steps were heard near, and she hastily re-entered the house.

The footsteps heard were those of Allan, who came leisurely up the flight, a broad and stately one, which led to the terrace. He had, while proceeding down the avenue, observed the pair together, and, as it seemed to him, in rather too close proximity. He also remarked Olive's abrupt departure, at *his* approach as he supposed, and his soul become ireful within him; but he felt himself, as he gave a hand to Holcroft, compelled to dissemble.

So did the latter who met him smilingly.

'Welcome home to Dundargue,' he exclaimed; 'you have come back as unexpectedly as you went; but whither?'

'Only as far as Edinburgh.'

'Ah.' The reply seemed rather to relieve Holcroft. Nothing was known about him there, he thought.

'A lady was on the terrace with you just now?'

'Yes—Miss Raymond.'

'So I thought—sorry she did not stay.'

'Why—particularly?'

'I have some news that may interest her.'

'About whom?'

'Herself.'

'Hope they are pleasant?'

'That will depend upon how she may view them,' said Allan, with a nod, as he entered the house.

'Now, what the deuce has he been up to—this fellow, with his hair cut to the military pattern—Newgate crop, I should call it—he looks queer this morning,' muttered Holcroft, as he selected a cigar from

his case, bit the end off with his sharp white teeth, and proceeded to smoke it with brief, angry, and unenjoyable puffs that indicated a mind full of bitterness and ill at ease. Olive's communication had been a sudden revelation to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALLAN PROVES MYSTERIOUS.

If Allan's sudden departure and unexplained absence excited some curiosity in the minds of his family, his return excited it afresh when he declined to make any explanation until he had held an interview with his cousin, Olive Raymond, who, for a time, secluded herself in her own room on the usual feminine plea of having a headache.

Eveline, who had so longed for his return, now with tears told him of her father's frequently expressed wish—nay,

command, and Sir Paget's forthcoming proposal; but, full of his own miseries, he could only caress her and say,

'God bless you, little one. I wish you well over all this.'

Sir Paget had left Dundargue pending the final arrangements, as he thought; thus the cloud and the dread were hanging over her still.

'Has Olive received back her gold bangle —my gift—from Mr. Holcroft?' asked Allan, with knitted brows.

'I—I think not. How did you learn he had it?'

'Plainly enough—I saw it on his wrist!'

'Where he put it, in play—not she.'

'I should hope not, by Jove!'

'I know she has asked him for it repeatedly.'

'Can't make the beggar out.'

'I can—he thinks Olive an heiress.

Allan's dark brow became more deeply knitted.

'She thinks that if she married you, Allan dear,' said his sister, after a pause, 'she would be sacrificing her own pride and liberty, and that you might marry her though not caring for her——'

'But for that wretched money?' said Allan, with a kind of snort. 'Poor Olive—she views the situation in this light! I certainly shall not ask her to make any sacrifices for *me*, and, so far as I am concerned, she shall be free as a bird in the air.'

His sister regarded him now with some perplexity, not understanding what he meant, but said,

'You have just come in time for a little carpet-dance we have arranged as a farewell treat to Ruby Logan, Mr. Holcroft, and—and Evan Cameron, who are about to leave Dundargue.'

Allan noted the inflection of her voice

as she uttered the name of his young brother officer, and then hurried away, as their mother entered the room, and with rather a cloudy expression in her face, though he hastened to kiss her.

'You have been to Edinburgh, I have heard,' she said.

'Yes.'

'About what, Allan?'

'That you will learn in time, mother. I must speak with Olive first.'

Lady Aberfeldie was full of irrepressible curiosity, but Allan declined to gratify it just then.

'Have your recent movements any reference to Olive?'

'You will learn in time, mother.'

Lady Aberfeldie's face shaded with annoyance, for, only the day before, she and the petulant young lady in question had indulged in a tift between them.

Perceiving a wistful look and fitful man-

ner about Olive, and that she was more than usually restless and irritable, Lady Aberfeldie had unwisely spoken to her on the subject of Allan's regard for her.

Olive had sat for a moment or two, with her delicate hands tightly interlaced in her lap, and then, turning defiantly to her aunt, she said,

'I will never marry Allan!'

'You must marry Allan, my dear girl,' replied Lady Aberfeldie, calmly and firmly.

'Why?'

'You know your father's wish.'

'Oh, the will, of course! So I am to be treated like a child? Well, if so, I may prove a wilful and dangerous one!'

Her aunt's report of this conversation made Lord Aberfeldie more than ever anxious for the return of his son.

'You are very mysterious, Allan. You and Olive seem a pair of enigmas,' said Lady Aberfeldie. 'But your father waits

you in the library, and perhaps you will condescend to confide in him, if not in *me*. I must own it will be a fatal thing for your future happiness if Olive thinks you seek her for gain; but for what does Mr. Holcroft so evidently seek her?'

Allan smiled disdainfully.

'I have tried to think, mother dear, that she is *not* affected by this person Holcroft, but begin to own to myself that "the faith that worketh miracles" is not in me.'

When questioned by his father, Allan made the same reticent reply, that he must see Olive before making any explanations.

'The time has come now, Allan,' said Lord Aberfeldie, 'when you are bound in honour to make your cousin an offer, for in this peculiar entanglement—for such, I grant you, it is—you and she do not stand in the position of most engaged persons.'

'But suppose I have no wish to marry——'

'Absurd—outrageous!'

'Or may not marry at all?'

'By the refusal of Olive?'

'Yes.'

'Then her fortune, or most of it, becomes yours, in terms of the will——'

'Which has been a curse to us both. In her mind, and in the eyes of all who may come to hear of it, we must lie under the degrading imputation of a mercenary motive.'

'Not if you act with tact and delicacy, and surely your boy-and-girl attachment must remain unchanged,' said Lord Aberfeldie, in a voice that was soft, rather than indignant, as his memory went back to the day when Olive first came a little orphan child to Dundargue—a tiny and graceful creature, with tender, wondering, and beseeching eyes—a child that climbed upon his knee, clung to him with sympathetic love, and played with his watch-chain or

the tassels of his sash, if he was in uniform. 'And so,' he added, after a pause, 'you must propose to the dear girl as a mere matter of form.'

'I have already done so,' said Allan, recalling, what he was not likely to forget, all that had occurred during the homeward ride from Dunsinane.

'Well, sir?' asked his father.

'I was laughed at—mocked, I may say.'

'Impossible! The girl must have been jesting with you.'

'I do not think so,' said Allan, both sadly and bitterly as he thought of the bangle and many other circumstances, the inevitable 'trifles light as air.'

'Well, you are bound to renew your proposal.'

'I do not think so, nor shall I again, unless some change comes over her.'

'If I exert my authority as guardian and trustee——'

'She may run away. Olive is a proud and restless girl with a defiant spirit, though she has a very affectionate heart.'

'But you cannot expect that she is to propose to *you*.'

'I do love her, father—love her dearly; but fear that she views me too much as a brother to love me otherwise.'

'This is rank nonsense. Think of your separations, and of your last—one well nigh seven years—with the Black Watch.'

'But might it not be the case that she may have a *penchant* for some one else?'

'For whom?' asked Lord Aberfeldie, angrily.

'Well, say for your friend Mr. Holcroft.'

'Penniless Hawke Holcroft! absurd—the man has seen but little of her.'

'Quite enough in London and here to learn to admire, if not to love her. I would, however, rather see her laid in her grave than married to Holcroft,' said Allan, in a

stern but broken voice, adding under his breath, as he left his father's presence and cut short an unpleasant interview, 'but, so far as I am concerned, she shall be free to choose for herself—free as the wind.'

'What the deuce can all this mean?' exclaimed Lord Aberfeldie, in great perplexity; 'was ever an unfortunate man more troubled with two intractable girls, than I am with Eveline and Olive!'

It has been said that, 'if exceedingly few men and women understand each other when they are in their sober senses, how must it fare when they are under the blinding influence of love?'

But Allan's course of action was decided now.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLIVE CHANGES HER MIND.

'You are pleased to see me again, Olive?'

'Of course, Allan—why do you ask me?' she exclaimed, putting both her hands into his in welcome.

He retained them with a tender pressure for half a minute, looking the while wistfully into her violet eyes, and then he let them drop from his clasp.

'You wish particularly to speak with me, I understand?' said Olive, nervously thinking it must refer to the *tête-à-tête* he had overseen on the terrace.

'Yes—particularly, dear Olive.'

When he saw her tender beauty, her grace, and her witchery, and felt all the subtle charm of her presence, his heart was wrung by the thought that, by the very act he had the power to do, and the suggestions he was about to make to her, he might place her at the entire disposal of Hawke Holcroft, of whose real character he now knew more than formerly.

How variable had been the emotions she had, ever since his return from India, exhibited towards him! By turns she had been changeable and indifferent apparently; playful, petulant, and imperious; yet always bewitching and sweet.

Seeing the cloudy and sad expression of his eye, Olive said,

'You have not come to scold me for anything, Allan. We are at least friends.'

'Would we were more,' said Allan, re-

membering what his father had urged but a few minutes before.

'Surely to be cousins is a near enough relationship.'

'Olive,' said he, reproachfully, 'unless you have formed a distinct attachment for some one else, I must say I do not understand you.'

'I don't want you to understand me,' she replied, with half-averted face.

'Why are you so hard with me?' he exclaimed, with a wistful, longing, and miserable expression in his eyes.

She made no reply, so he spoke again.

'I have had a long consultation with our family agent in Edinburgh.'

'About what?'

'Your affairs and mine, Olive.'

'*My* affairs?'

'Yes, and I have obtained the opinion of Ruby Logan's father, and of counsel of much higher—yes, of the highest—repute

on the vexed subject of your father's will—vexed at least between you and I, Olive.'

She gazed at him with something of vacant surprise blended with inquiry in her face.

'What I am about to suggest may be dangerous, as I do not know the terms on which you permit yourself to be with this—Mr. Holcroft—but I have had excellent legal advice, and——'

'Legal advice—oh, indeed!' she interrupted, with a toss of her pretty head; 'that is well, for the laws as made by you men rank us women with children and lunatics. And what says this advice?'

'That you can be freed from the trammels of your father's will—free, and the inheritrix of your own great wealth.'

She regarded him for a minute with blank astonishment; then as bright joy like sunshine spread over her sweet face

and sparkled in the depth of her eyes, she exclaimed, in a low voice,

'Free, do you say, free in my own actions, and free to bestow papa's money how and on whom I please?'

'On *whom* you please,' replied Allan, thinking with intense mortification on Holcroft, and Holcroft only; for personally he was far above thinking of the fortune that might otherwise be his own, as the stars are above the earth. 'Let me but see all this matter fully arranged and then I shall be content,' said he, after a pause, during which they had been regarding each other; he, her with sadness, and she him with bewilderment. 'There are rumours in the air of a turn-up with the Turks, and of a war in Egypt, and right glad I am of that!'

'Why, Allan?'

'Because I'll get attached to the first army corps that sails, even if the Black Watch is not going; but that it is sure to

be, as, thank God! the dear old corps is always in everything.'

'And why this joy?'

'To get as far away from you as possible,' he replied, bluntly, in a hollow tone.

'Must you do so, Allan?'

'Yes, unless I mean to drive myself mad.'

'Do you really love me so much—and—and,' she paused, for she seemed touched, her sweet lips were quivering now.

'What more?'

'For myself alone,' she asked, softly.

'Love you—oh, Olive.'

'There now, don't!' she exclaimed, turning away her face, and Allan shrank back.

'Playing with me, after all—after all!' he muttered. 'Will you please to look at the opinion of counsel,' he added, drawing from his pocket a folio document, stitched with a red thread, and with a broad margin.

'What a long story!' she exclaimed, as she glanced at and read,

'Chambers, Edinburgh.

'Copy of Counsel's opinion referred to in letter of 20th October, 1882, on the will of the late Oliver Raymond, Esq, of Jamaica, with note of fees thereon.'

'What a fearful long story!' exclaimed Olive again. 'Tell me all about it, Allan? but pray don't read it.'

'The will of your father is herein denounced as eccentric—one that no court of law would enforce, nor could uphold, as in more than one instance it is not conceived in strictly legal terms, and, to all intents and purposes, can be put aside if you choose. Thus, Olive, you are free—free from all the bonds—if such ever existed—that seemed to bind you to me; and I thank God that it is so, and I shall go to Egypt, perhaps, with a lighter heart. All that now remains

to be done is to take the means, if such are necessary, to have the document set aside as so much waste paper, and you duly made mistress of your inheritance, as you are now of age, in England, at least, where it is invested. Thus, you see, Olive, this opinion of counsel is most valuable to you.'

Her soft eyes were brimming over with tears now, as she mechanically took the document in her tremulous fingers.

'And thus you relinquish me?' she said.

'I relinquish, gladly, your fortune, and all control over your actions, if—you choose.'

'But I don't choose! Oh, Allan, how generous all this is of you. But I shall not be less so, nor will I act upon this opinion of counsel.'

'How?'

'See, thus!'

And, tearing it into pieces, she cast them into the fire-grate.

'Illegal as it may be, papa's will must be *now* a law to me more than ever.'

'And you, Olive?'

'Love you, dear Allan, and love you dearly,' cried the wilful and impulsive girl, as all her heart went forth to him, and he pressed her to his breast at last.

Doubt, pride, defiance, and petulance had all passed away, and Olive was all softness, love, and joy now; and to the pair time seemed for a term to stand still, and save their caressing words softly murmured, and the twitter of birds among the ivy without, silence appeared to reign in this room; and nothing seemed to disturb them, till Olive suddenly started from Allan's arms.

'What is it, love?' he asked.

'A face at the window!'

'Whose face?'

'I know not,' she replied, with some agitation. 'It has just vanished.'

She thought, nay, she was sure, it had the features of Hawke Holcroft, but she did not *say* so. If it were he, how much had he overheard, how much overseen!

But she soon forgot the episode, and that night at dinner she looked more radiant than ever, in her suite of Maltese jewellery —gold set with orient pearls.

'It is usual for engaged ladies to have a ring,' Allan had whispered, as he slipped a magnificently jewelled hoop upon her mystic finger.

'Fool that I have been!' thought the girl. 'How near was I estranging one of the best and dearest of men in the world, not for the sake of one immeasurably his inferior, even worthless perhaps, but in a spirit of vanity, pique, and suspicion!'

'Allan,' she whispered to him softly, when an opportunity came, 'I see now how foolish I have been and wilful—oh, so wilful! But we all make mistakes in life, and

require at times each other's pity and forgiveness.'

How sweetly and shyly she looked and spoke.

Hawke Holcroft felt intuitively, and indeed saw, that there was some sudden change in the bearing of the pair to each other, and that a sudden brightness had come into the faces of all—even that of Eveline, usually now so *triste* and pale—and under his sandy moustache he 'wondered what the devil it all meant,' till his watchful eyes detected the new and brilliant ring on the engaged finger of Olive Raymond!

If Mr. Hawke Holcroft imagined he had nothing to dread personally from the Master's sudden visit to Edinburgh he reckoned without his host, as he would have found had he overheard a brief conversation which took place between Allan and his comrade, young Cameron, as they loitered

in the gun-room looking over old Joe-Mantons, new rifles, and central-fire breech-loaders, &c.

He was not slow to perceive very soon that Allan, usually so suave and pleasant in manner, treated him now with a kind of stiffness that was almost hauteur; but he dissembled his rage and so did Allan, who had a keen sense of the laws of hospitality, with the genuine British dread of aught that might approach a 'scene,' more than all as the visit of Holcroft was nearly ended.

Poor wretch! he strove well to keep a brave front in society, while letters that often lay beside his plate at breakfast were seen to cloud his brow with perplexity, for they alluded to wrong horses backed, I. O. U.'s, bills, and cheques 'referred to drawer,' and so forth, and he must have left Dundargue before this, but for a friendly slip of paper, which he had received from

Lord Aberfeldie, that 'Fool of Quality,' as he thought him.

'Look here, Cameron,' said Allan, as the twain smoked their cigars in a quiet place. 'It is little wonder to me that you, Sir Paget Puddicombe, and one or two others lost at cards with Holcroft as you did. I dined with our fellows at the mess in the Castle when I went to Edinburgh. There his name cropped up by the merest chance, and I was told by Carslogie of Ours that he was present at a shindy in London, where this fellow Holcroft, after having an unprecedented run at cards at a place in St. James Street, was accused of having the ace of trumps up his sleeve, from whence it fell when he was shying a bottle at the accuser's head. He talks to the pater largely of his "place in Essex," or what remains of it. Involved in debt to a ruinous extent, he gave bills right and left, which were dishonoured. £10,000 *had* been rais-

ed upon his estate, in which he had only a reversionary interest, and, when the mortgagees called in their money, and the estate was sold, it did not suffice to pay a tithe of the sums he had raised in every conceivable way, and everyone lost their money all round. Sharp that! Yet he scraped through without punishment.'

'By Jove!'

'Worse still. Carslogie told me he was suspected of causing a horse to fail in a race through having the bit poisoned; and how he left a young fellow in the Hussars at Maidstone in the lurch, by refusing at the last moment to ride for him a peculiarly vicious horse, which he had solemnly undertaken to do, and so causing him to lose the race, on which he had most imprudently made a ruinously heavy book.'

'And how did it end?'

'The report of a pistol that night in the cavalry barrack announced that the Hussar

had shot himself—that is all! And this is the "young man of the period" whom my father's confiding simplicity has made a welcome guest for some weeks back at Dundargue, and thrown into the society of my sister and Olive! But I shall fully open his eyes the moment our visitor is gone.'

But it was rather a pity for his own sake that Allan did not 'open' Lord Aberfeldie's eyes a little before that event, and such being the character of Mr. Hawke Holcroft the reader may feel less surprised at some of the things we may have to record of him ere long.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CARPET-DANCE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

Though somewhat of the nature of an impromptu affair, the 'carpet-dance' partook of something of a more important kind. Many guests were invited; the ladies were in semi-toilet and the gentlemen in evening dress: but the great dancing-room at Dundargue was decorated to perfection by the care of Mr. Tappleton, the butler, the housekeeper, and gardener, with the rarest plants, flowers, and ferns the conservatories could produce, disposed in China and Japanese jars on pedestals and marble console

tables of the time of Louis XIV., at whose court a Lord Aberfeldie had once been ambassador.

The fete had been brought about by the two fair cousins as a farewell treat to the last of their present guests, who were departing—Ruby Logan, Stratherroch, and—Mr. Holcroft!

Greatly to Eveline's relief, Sir Paget was gone, but, as if to worry her further, Sir Paget left for her—with Lady Aberfeldie—a letter referring to his admiration and regard for her since the last season in London, and with it a handsome diamond necklet—the sight of which in its fragrant Russian-leather case she loathed—with the hope that she would accept and wear it, in token that she was holding out brilliant hopes to him when 'they met in town again.'

Eveline flatly declined to accept and wear the jewellery, so, to her intense annoyance,

it remained as yet in her mother's hands. She was 'biding her time.'

The wealthy suitor had attained a battered middle-age, while Eveline was still in the glory of her youth. True, but he had both wealth and rank to offer, for though she was an 'Honourable Miss,' he was a baronet, and so far as his love went, if it came late in life, it was, nevertheless, a kind of overmastering passion.

The new emotions of her heart caused Eveline to reflect more than perhaps she had ever done before. It seemed but yesterday since she and Olive conned their tasks and practised their scales together under the eyes of a governess; since they had gathered bouquets of wild flowers from the clefts of the rocks of Dundargue, and made fairy caps of rushes and harebells by the burnside; happy children both; but how miserable she was now that she was on the verge of womanhood, and had learned

to love and to hate; for she loved Evan Cameron, and hated—yes, and she blushed as she admitted it to herself—she did hate that smiling and rubicund old interloper, Sir Paget.

'And you will not wear the necklet?' said Lady Aberfeldie, for the last time.

'Do please to excuse me, dearest mamma—I cannot—yet a while.'

Lady Aberfeldie was pleased by the half obedience these words implied.

'What ornaments will you wear then?' she asked. 'You have so many to choose from.'

'Let me wear the lovely diamond necklace that lies in the strong casket in your room, mamma.'

Lady Aberfeldie's calm, patrician face darkened.

'I would rather you wore no diamonds at all, child; and these I never wear myself.'

'But why, mamma?'

'Because that necklace always brings evil to whoever wears it.'

'So I have heard. But it is a silly superstition, and they are such lovely stones! But what is the story of them?'

'The wife of a cavalier who died with Montrose on the scaffold of Edinburgh gave them to an ancestor of ours to save his life. This was the first viscount, who was a zealous Covenanter, and the bosom friend of Lord Warriston. He certainly took the jewels from the poor sorrowing wife——'

'And the cavalier?'

'Was beheaded by the Maiden at the market-cross, and a kind of curse seems to have attended these diamonds ever since.'

'A cruel story.'

'But a true one.'

Eveline laughed at the superstition, kissed her cold, proud mother, and carried her

point; thus, at the time when carriage after carriage was depositing guests at the great arched entrance hall, Eveline was surveying her figure and face in the mirror with all a young girl's satisfaction and thinking that her slender white throat never looked as it did then, when encircled by the sparkling diamonds of the luckless widow, and Olive at the same time was looking radiant in the Maltese suite of Allan.

How the two last named enjoyed the carpet-dance! Perfect confidence was so sweetly established between them, they had so many little secrets to tell, so many revelations to make, so many comparisons of mutual hopes and fears, and so forth, while each seemed to exult in the affection of the other, and felt in their hearts the words ascribed to old Catullus :—

'Let those love now who never loved before.
Let those who always loved, now love the more!'

'Those two young fools seem to under-

stand each other and each other's interests at last!' whispered Lord to Lady Aberfeldie, with a smile of amusement.

'But there are two *other* young fools present who are doing their best to mar each other's interests,' was her cold and warning response.

Hawke Holcroft's shifty eyes lowered as he watched the cousins and whirled in a waltz with Ruby Logan or any other girl who came to hand. He was in utter perplexity to find the new footing on which these hitherto strange lovers so suddenly were, and that he himself was, as he felt and thought, 'nowhere!'

What could she mean? There was something of radiance in the faces of all the family—even of the sweetly pensive Eveline—all indicative of a new movement that *he* was out of.

'As for Olive,' he muttered, while a sentiment of rage, mingled with avarice and

jealousy, grew strong in his heart, 'she is an infernal weather-cock, but a deuced handsome one!'

Ruby Logan was equally puzzled, but found consolation with young Carslogie of the Black Watch, whom Allan had invited to the festivity, and who styled her, with reference to her hair, 'the amber witch.'

'Happy Olive and Allan,' thought Eveline, as she rested for a minute on the arm of Cameron, 'they may have as many round dances as they choose without remark, while mine, with *him*, must be few and far between.'

Her dress was white silk, trimmed with little laurel leaves and crowberry—the latter a delicate attention to Evan, as it is the badge of the Camerons.

'Will you wear my colours to-night?' she asked, as they promenaded at that end of the room which was furthest away from 'papa and mamma.' She broke off a spray

and made him a button-hole. 'Allow me to fix it for you,' said Eveline, and deftly she put it in his lapel, while Evan's heart thrilled to feel the touch of her beloved hand —even though gloved—so near his heart, as they swept into another waltz.

'Aberfeldie,' said the hostess to her husband, 'I feel certain that Evan Cameron is in love with our Eveline.'

Lord Aberfeldie had no doubt about it whatever now, but he only said,

'He would be a fool to be otherwise.'

'But that is not what we seek!'

'Certainly not; but all young fellows have fancies; and he will be gone from this in a few hours now.'

'Thank Heaven, yes!' responded Lady Aberfeldie, devoutly.

'By the way, why did you permit her to wear those unlucky diamonds?'

'She pled so hard, and then the idea of their bringing evil is so behind the age.'

'Behind the age or not, something untoward or unlucky always accompanies their appearance in public. They should have been sent to Bond Street long ago.'

And Lord Aberfeldie smiled on her affectionately, as at that moment he could not help thinking how handsome and young his wife looked in her costume of rich ruby velvet, trimmed at the square cut neck and arms with the finest white old lace, while jewels that an empress might have worn glittered in her ears and hair.

Replacing sometimes the professional musicians, making themselves useful at the piano, and playing certainly good dance music were two—the 'mermaids,' as Holcroft called them—the minister's daughters, who were usually so fond of warbling that they 'were under the blue sea.'

He knew nothing of what Allan had learned concerning him—of the light Carslogie had thrown on his private life; thus,

whatever change had come over the spirit of Olive's dream, he deemed it necessary to ask her for, at least, one round dance as usual; and Allan watched them with a haughty grimace on his features as they danced it in a silent manner that was peculiar and rather oppressive to both. The moment it was over, and he handed her back to a seat, Holcroft took refuge in the refreshment-room, where Mr. Tappleton gave him a foaming glass of sparkling champagne.

Young Cameron was rather grave, Allan thought, but the former was oppressed by one idea then, that on the morrow he would have to report himself at the headquarters of the Black Watch, and he gazed like one in a dream at the dancers whirling round him; so Allan took him to task and strove to rally him.

'Why so sad, old fellow? You're down on your luck, somehow,' said he.

'Because, Graham,' replied Cameron, with a forced smile, 'there are times when I am inclined to ask with Mr. Mallock, "Is life worth living?"'

'Of course it is—but how with you?'

'Well,' replied Cameron, with whom just then one bitter thought was more than usually keen, 'dipped nigh to sinking as my place of Stratherroch is, I don't see so much to live for, and certainly deuced little to live upon.'

'Don't take this gloomy view, old fellow,' said Allan, cheerfully.

'It is very well for you to take a jolly view of the world, Allan—you, the son of a peer, and engaged to——'

'Take heart, man; we've lots of life before us—life in Egypt perhaps. There is Eveline sitting alone; take another turn with her, and then we'll have some of Mumms' extra dry together.'

Eveline had opened an album as Cameron

drew near her, but closed it instantly as the first photo that met her eyes was a fine cabinet one of Sir Paget. There was an expression of pensive sweetness in her otherwise radiant face, for she, poor girl, never for a moment forgot that a parting—too probably a final one it might prove—was close at hand now, and, after the two past delightful months, how dreary would the future seem!

'Are you tired?' said a tender voice in her ear; 'it is our dance, I think—but would you rather sit it out?'

'A little promenade rather.'

He bowed, and, rising, she took his proffered arm. They made a circuit of the room once or twice, and then, lured no doubt by the coolness and seclusion of a long corridor, entered it, unnoticed as they thought; but the watchful gaze of Lady Aberfeldie had followed them.

There was much to see in this long,

stately, and vaulted corridor, and its deeply embayed windows overlooking the rock on which the oldest part of Dundargue is perched. Its floor was of *parqueterie;* its walls of wainscot, with massively framed old pictures; some trophies of arms and family armour hung there, and the windows were furnished with ancient stone seats and modern stained glass, through which the radiance of the setting sun was contending with the dim shaded lamps.

Specimens of unique china and frail goblets of Venetian glass, with other objects of 'bigotry and virtue,' as Holcroft had called them, were there in oaken cabinets and on exquisite brackets. Among other things, on a pedestal, skilfully stuffed, the last golden eagle that had been shot at the Birks of Aberfeldie, by the gun of Dugald Glas, a glorious bird that measured five feet from tip to tip of his shining pinions;

yet none of these things caught the attention of the two promenaders.

Her hand was on his arm; involuntarily that arm pressed the soft and tremulous fingers which rested there, and in another moment his hand stole over them without their being withdrawn—nay, it seemed as if their load became more heavy.

Eveline was not unaware that there was something morally wrong in the situation; but, then, 'the situation had its charm.'

'Eveline!'

Cameron had never before ventured to call her by her Christian name, nor, until it passed his lips half unconsciously now, had he an intention of so uttering it; but that utterance seemed scarcely a new revelation to the girl.

Soft and lovely was the shy smile upon her upturned face as they stood within the

deep bay of a window. Was it that smile, or what, that dazed Evan Cameron and swept his senses away; but he caught her suddenly in his arms and kissed her lips and eyes, whispering,

'Oh! Eveline, my darling—my darling!'

And then there was a pause, full of sighs of happiness. 'The stone was cast into the water, and the still lake broke up into a stormy sea, where there would be peace and quiet no more!' No more, at least, unless the future held some happiness for these two poor loving hearts.

'Have I done wrong?' said Cameron, in a breathless voice, after a little time; 'God knows I never meant that you should see how dearly, how desperately, and how hopelessly I love you when I let the precious secret escape me as I did; but it is done now.'

She was pale as death and trembling violently, as she thought of her mother; yet she nestled closely and clingingly to him.

'You love me, Eveline?'

'Can you ask?' she whispered. 'Yes—oh, yes—Evan.'

He was intoxicated, and drew her close to him again. Such a moment comes but once in life—once only!

'Let us go now—we shall be missed,' said Eveline.

'Oh, stay one moment longer, darling.'

'Mamma, if we could only get her to be our friend, all might be right and go well.'

'Even with my poverty, Eveline?'

'Don't call it so. Yes, papa always gives in to her in the long run.'

Cameron sighed.

'Are you two practising for amateur theatricals, or admiring the stars through the stained glass?' said the voice of Lord Aberfeldie, suddenly.

We have said that the eyes of his wife had followed the pair, and hence no doubt his lordship's sudden appearance in the dimly-lighted corridor. Both were painfully confused.

How much had Lord Aberfeldie overseen, how much had he overheard, or how little of both? It was impossible for them to guess, but he good-naturedly affected not to see all that his mind took in.

Cameron felt that he had nothing to explain, to urge, or to utter, but bowed, smiled a very hollow smile indeed, and led his partner back to the dancing-room, where neither waltzed more that evening, as the impromptu affair was over, the

guests were departing, and Lord Aberfeldie was beginning to think that the diamonds of the legend were already producing their evil results in this the first untoward event in the young life of his daughter.

Allan and Cameron, avoiding Holcroft, sat long that night in the former's room smoking and imbibing brandy-and-soda, but no word escaped the lover of what had passed in the corridor; and, sooth to say, full of Olive and himself, Allan had never missed the pair from the dancing-room.

Cameron was to leave Dundargue betimes next morning, so he bade farewell to his comrade, who charged him with remembrances to 'all our fellows of the Black Watch;' and anon Cameron found himself alone with his own loving, exulting, sad, and anxious thoughts, and with

the little bouquet—a dwarf laurel leaf and sprig of crowberry—dearer to him then than even his Victoria Cross!

Again and again did he rehearse that sweet episode in the dimly-lit corridor, and again and again in the time to come would it return with sorrowful reiteration to his heart and memory!

Eveline loved him! Her own lips had acknowledged it, her kisses seemed still to linger on his lips; but to what end—my God! he exclaimed, in bitterness of heart, to what end? Again and again he thought over her plaintive and child-like wish, 'if we could only get mamma to be our friend,' and all that wish suggested. Her mother suspected much, he feared, and that her father knew all. Sir Paget, with his colossal wealth, was looming in the distance like a simoon to the newly dawned love; and poor Evan could but

come to the terrible conclusion that, like too many others, his penniless love could only be a hopeless one.

So wore the night away—the last, Cameron was assured, he would ever spend in Dundargue; and morning came.

Unslept, Cameron made rapidly the prosaic preparations for his departure, and a valet had borne off his portmanteaus, rugs, and gun-case to the entrance hall, where the sleepy Mr. Tappleton and a wagonette awaited him.

As he was about to descend the great, silent staircase, suddenly Eveline, fully dressed for the day and softly slippered, stood before him, her mignonne face very pale, and her soft hazel eyes inflamed by past weeping.

'Evan!'

'My darling!'

No housemaids were about as yet,

and no prying eyes were there, nor had Ronald Gair with his pipes blown *reveille*.

'I could not let you go without—without one word of farewell,' she sobbed.

Long and mute was their embrace, and the heart of Cameron swelled as if to bursting with mingled love and gratitude. He pressed her to it. It was their parting embrace, and both seemed to feel in it that which a writer has described as 'the vibration of an agony.'

'I feel as if I were bereft of reason!' he whispered.

'My poor Evan—my own dear love!' cooed the girl. One kiss more, and he was gone.

When or where, if ever, would they meet again?

Eveline had nervously and sedulously avoided Sir Paget till the time of *his* departure; and, when he did leave Dundargue

in the dawn, he was only seen off by the old butler; but Evan Cameron had an unexpected farewell caress, the memory of a sad, soft, and clinging kiss that he was to take away with him to what he deemed the land of bondage, and tearful eyes watched his wagonette as it passed down the avenue and out upon the high-road that led to the railway.

Evan looked backwards at the tall and stately pile of Dundargue, on which the rays of the rising sun shone redly, and deep in his heart he envied Carslogie, who was to remain behind for a couple of days' shooting. Yet wherefore should he envy any man while Eveline loved him? was his afterthought.

And she, poor girl, seemed to feel herself left most terribly alone with all her sorrow—alone amid her loving family and splendid surroundings, and with Evan's

words of love lingering in her ear she was soon bidden to school herself to think of Sir Paget, and Sir Paget Puddicombe only! 'The human creature,' it has been written, 'who would have suited us to every fibre of our being we have not found, or, having found, have not possessed; but (perhaps) undervalued, and so allowed to pass out of our lives.'

These two suited each other 'to a fibre,' as our author quaintly puts it, and in perfect unanimity of sentiment; and yet for all that they may be compelled to pass out of each other's lives, and live those lives far, far apart.

Under her mother's scrutiny Eveline strove hard to dissemble, and on receiving her morning kiss said,

'Well, mamma, no evil has come of the wearing the diamonds—Dundargue has not taken fire.'

'No, child—indeed, good has come!'

'How, mamma?'

'This morning's mail has brought an enclosure for you—the formal proposal of Sir Paget.'

Eveline was stricken dumb, but thought to herself,

'Unhappy I—evil *has* come!'

And ere noon was passed she was taken to task by her father in the library, prompted by her mother, no doubt.

He drew her to him caressingly, and, interlacing his fingers upon her head, drew her soft cheek upon his breast.

'I think, Eveline,' said he, 'you may know by this time how well I love you.'

'I do, indeed, papa,' replied Eveline, in a low voice, but feeling her heart sink under this unusual prelude nevertheless.

'And yet you have been deluding me.'

'Deluding you—I, papa?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, how?'

'By encouraging—pardon me, not that—rather by permitting a visitor to encourage certain hopes. That, you know, it is impossible I should view with favour.'

'You mean—you mean——' stammered Eveline, recalling the episode in the corridor.

'Evan Cameron.'

'He is gone,' said she, with difficulty restraining her tears.

'To darken the door of Dundargue no more! Not that I have any fault to find with poor Cameron—a brave fellow who has won his V.C., and is a Black Watchman to boot; but he is Laird of Strath-erroch only in name; his purse does not

come up to the requisite standard, and may never do so till both your heads are grey; but he is gone, as you say, and we shall think of him no more. I have other brighter, better, and richer views for you, my dear child, and I hope you will not disappoint us all. Sir Paget loves you, and you will think seriously over all this?'

'How can I do otherwise, papa?' was the dubious response, and the girl stole away to her own room. So wearing the diamonds seemed only to be bringing about a sudden crisis in the affairs of herself and the banished Evan Cameron, for such she deemed him.

And, ere she went to bed that night, Eveline, poor girl, strove to pray that she might have some guide or assistance up the stony and thorny path which she feared was before her now in life; but she

no longer now had the deep and unbroken sleep that had ever been her lot the moment her soft cheek touched the pillow. Too nervous to sleep alone, she crept in beside Olive, and, nestling her little face in the white bosom of her cousin, wept long and bitterly.

But events were now to occur that caused even the brilliant proposal of Sir Paget to be forgotten.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 046409923